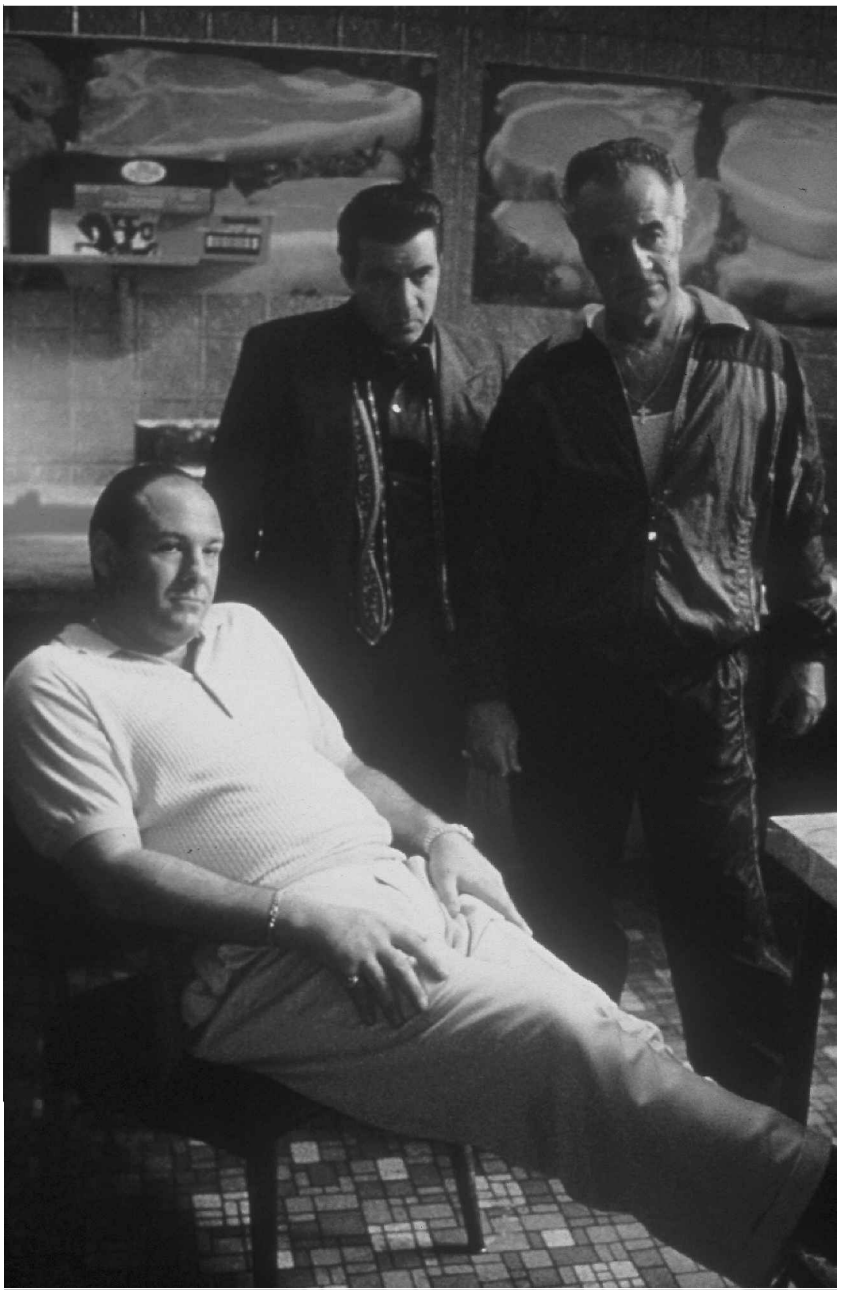

Anthony Neste/HBO

James Gandolfini as mob boss Tony Soprano, with two of his "soldiers" (Steven van Zandt, Tony Sirico)

Martha P. Nochimson

Waddaya Lookin' At?

Re-reading the Gangster Genre Through "The Sopranos"

The beast in me is caged by frail
and fragile bands,
Restless by day and by night rants
and rages at the stars
God help the beast in me.

—Nick Lowe, "The Beast in Me"

Perceived as hypermasculine fare, the gangster picture is generally understood to be popular because of its explosive virility and its close connection to reality. Yet despite these entrenched truisms, hindsight and the progeny that have been spawned by the early masterpieces of the genre suggest that the situation is more complex. An extended narrative of the world of fin-de-siècle New Jersey mob boss Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini), "The Sopranos" reveals the media gangster as the core of a highly emotional mode of storytelling in which the pleasures of action and violence exist to speak not only about macho aggressiveness "ripped from today's headlines," but also about vulnerabilities that the display disguises and about troubling cultural conditions. "The Sopranos," David Chase's HBO series, is clearly an elegiac, self-conscious, tragicomic meditation on America's lost innocence, but less obviously it is also about the otherness of body and family to American corporate culture, and, above all, it is about the undying connections human beings have to one another despite a social system that maintains its hold through a divide-and-conquer strategy. In this, "The Sopranos" may seem to be an inversion of generic traditions, but, in fact, it

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Barry Wetcher/HBO

Lorraine Bracco as psychiatrist Dr. Jennifer Melfi

grows from elements in this species of media representation that have been simmering since its inception.

In order to explore "The Sopranos" as the unmasking of the heretofore thickly disguised emotional subtext of gangster stories, I will invoke a very precise, exclusive rather than inclusive definition of this category of entertainment. In so doing, I take a distinctly different approach from that of both casual public discourse and almost all serious scholarly discussion to date, which has conflated the gangster narrative with many other kinds of crime stories as part of one amorphous genre.

This discussion of the gangster project will read it as a subgenre of the media crime story set apart by three essential characteristics. First, in the gangster film the protagonists with whom we empathize reverse our usual patterns of identification by engaging us and our feelings with career criminals, often to the exclusion of empathy with law-abiding citizens. This can happen in other subgenres of crime entertainment, but not within a dense social context, which is the second essential trait of the gangster project. The gangster subgenre is epic in nature, highly social, and generally paints a panoramic picture of society and its values—all in all a departure from the usual emphasis in Hollywood on the purely personal and individualistic. Gangland protagonists are embedded in a well-articulated hierarchy of colleagues whose relationships may be turbulent but remain crucial to their well-being. For this reason, the final essential characteristic of the gangster subgenre is its unusually even matching of the opposing claims of the personal and the social, unusual in that Hollywood almost always weights the scale for the personal. Some major examples of this discrete subgenre are *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy* (1931), *Scarface* (1932), *White Heat* (1949), The "Godfather" trilogy (1972/74/90), *Prizzi's Honor* (1985), and *Goodfellas* (1994).

These defining characteristics leave for other discussions about other issues a wide range of other crime entertainment stories, including those in which ordinary people uncharacteristically commit a crime—Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (1944); Frank Chambers in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946); Marion Crane in *Psycho* (1960)—and those that focus on lone wolves or outlaw couples with scarcely a shred of social connection—*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967); *Badlands* (1973). They also rule out films and television shows in which the gangsters are the antagonists and the police, reporters, detectives, or intended victims of the crime

organization are the protagonists—*Deadline-U.S.A.* (1952); the "Dirty Harry" series (1971/76/88); *Dick Tracy* (1990). Movies about lone bandits, crime couples on the run, and intrepid lawmen are informed more by romanticism than by epic, and are generally studies in individualism—both of the policeman and the criminal. They either mark crime as an individual pathology or the individual as a persecuted being. They promote a complicated means for the audience to form an ephemeral, symbiotic relationship with voluptuous, perhaps masturbatory, lonely transgressive pleasures bearing on the disconnect between the group and the self.

In contrast, one equally transgressive subgenre permits a unique audience catharsis that speaks of the violence that erupts specifically because we are and need to be connected to other people. The catharsis is unique because its nuanced depiction of human connections, particularly with family, allows a forbidden look at "sacred" ties, which, despite the saccharine pronouncements of radical right-wing politics and much popular domestic drama, not only tempt but also trouble us. In the gangster drama, as in our lives, a strong desire for filiation complicates autonomy and the drive to succeed in a competitive economic system.

The media gangster's dilemma strikes a chord in the law-abiding public, resonating against the secret knowledge of the ordinary moviegoer that in a competitive capitalist society the emotional claims of the family are in crucial ways "other" to materialist success. Thus it is no accident that crime families in the gangster subgenre are noticeably foreign, immigrant. Their foreignness serves as a vehicle for portrayal of the ancient, pre-American call of family ties, while modern success is conveyed by the clean-cut Americans on the police force and in the FBI, who, not uncoincidentally, are almost always presented without reference to their families or to any connections that are not official. At varying levels of consciousness, the gangster film draws the audience into a radical alliance with an inversion of the usual definitions of "like" and "other," making American audiences adhere to the foreign.

"I'm Not So Tough"

The audience's surprising compact with the foreign element of blood and family connection in the gangster story makes possible a number of alternative perspectives, one of the most important being identification with a masculinity that is at once intensely virile *and* other to the standard self-contained masculine image. The gangster protagonist is in the most profound way a family man who gives the audience a means of obliquely exploring family life, free from the stigma attached to emotions and "women's entertainment" (often erroneously identified as the whole of melodrama). What is ordinarily identified as family melodrama is feminized and openly emotional, while the domestic melodrama of the gangster subgenre is muscularized, displacing emotion onto the tumult associated with violence.

"The Sopranos," as the inheritor of a long line of texts which disguise familial tensions, brings this displacement to the surface. When Tony Soprano's mother Livia (Nancy Marchand) conspires with his uncle Corrado "Junior" Soprano (Dominic Chianese) to have him killed, they are operating (albeit confusedly) within the imperatives of a gangland struggle for rule of the Northern New Jersey mob. But each is also trenchantly expressing garden-variety familial anger: Livia a familiar generational rage, because Tony has put her in a nursing home, and Junior a familiar fury about rank in families, because the leadership of the mob has been given to his nephew instead of to him. What also distinguishes the gangster melodrama from the domestic melodrama is how directly and intensely emotions are expressed in the domestic melodrama, while here the emotions of the situation are displaced onto the violent crime story. In "The Sopranos," Junior and Livia give each other permission to rid themselves of Tony with such minimalism that the audience is not sure what has transpired between them until the plans to kill Tony are put into action. The violence in the scenes in which an attempt is made on Tony's life expresses their rage with such displacement that they are not even present. Certainly this is standard operating procedure for gangster films. But that is the point: it is representative of the tradition of emotional displacement in this genre. The aggressor is invisible as the rage is expressed, as opposed to domestic melodrama, which unabashedly shows the venting of anger. Displacement protects the virility of the genre and gives the (male) viewers access to emotional situations they need not see in directly emotional terms.

The thinly disguised familial drama in "The Sopranos" is not a new wrinkle; the drama is just more visible. In *Public Enemy,* when Tommy Powers (James Cagney) collapses in the rain murmuring, "I'm not so tough," the low emotion/high violence scene, as with the scene of Tony's near assassination, utilizes an action sequence to raise the issue of family conflicts. Tommy's collapse is the result of a gangland shootout,

Anthony Neste/HBO

Generational rage: Livia (Nancy Marchand) with son Tony

but its import is dramatized in relationship to his mother, as it sets the scene for her impending discovery of his final appearance as a mummified corpse, horrifically evocative of a swaddled infant. On one level, then, Tommy's crime agon is a shoot-'em-and-die blood circus. But any gangster entertainment that is purely that is doomed to oblivion.

The abiding importance of *Public Enemy* is its early use of the gangster milieu as a metaphor for the complex tensions between individuation and family. It is an early example of the self-image of a culture awash in pious pronouncements about the value of both individualism and family which allows no way to integrate the blood ties of family with the isolating drive necessary to individuals bound for success. Comparison with *Public Enemy* and other classic gangster films is encouraged by "The Sopranos," which contains numerous allusions to *Scarface,* the "Godfather" trilogy, and *Public Enemy*. In the second episode of the third season, Tony watches *Public Enemy* the day his mother dies, with specific emphasis on scenes between Tommy Powers and his mother. Indeed, after her funeral, Tony watches the "I'm not so tough" scene and the scenes with Tommy's mother that the collapse sets up. The series is fully aware that Tony Soprano's thwarted attempts at meshing family and individuation is part of a long tradition. What is new in current gangster entertainment is that blunt, reflexive awareness of the genre's dark secret. "The Sopranos" deals openly in representations that were suppressed in the earlier classics. The cat is out of the bag from the very first episode. In the first image of the series, gang boss Tony Soprano is in dialogue with familial confusions, specifically the maternal influence: he is sitting in the office of a female psychiatrist, completely framed by the legs of a female nude sculpture (recalling his origins in the birth canal and the power of the mother). His curious gaze upward at the nude sculpture is a radical reversal of the conventionally possessive male gaze.

Tony begins the series already having discovered that he's "not so tough," collapsing as he periodically does from panic attacks, a debilitating condition whose cause, we later discover, is his extremely troubled connection with his mother and father. Tommy Powers never got a chance to process that thought, but like all other great media gangsters, he was suffused with ambivalence about mothers, sisters, and wives in the context of a similar confusion about brothers and father figures, and about the sexual and territorial implications of that ambiguity. "The Sopranos" offers Tony the opportunity for therapy and with a woman doctor, thereby making almost explicit its displaced investigation of the American family.

Linda Williams' seminal essay "Melodrama Revised" explores the melodramatic infrastructure of Hollywood entertainment and suggests a way to pierce the layers of historical misperception of the gangster subgenre. Williams' theory lays the groundwork for my proposal that the gangster project is not a genre but a subgenre of a subgenre (crime entertainment) of melodrama. In her essay she explores a structuring tension between (realistic) action and (certain intensities of) melodrama as the inner dynamic of most Hollywood entertainment, giving us a vocabulary for speaking of the perennial (if veiled) importance of emotion, family, and women in the gangster classics.

Williams theorizes that the Hollywood action genres are really all varieties of melodramas played out within a variety of discrete action conventions that each stage a narrative of misprized innocence: "If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action, then the operative mode is melodrama."[1]

Surprisingly, an extended discussion of the Hollywood gangster—Cagney, Robinson, Muni, Pacino—reveals that his drama *is* the staging of his innocence and his victimhood, though not in the tropes associated with domestic melodrama. The gangster's behavior is related to a social setting (and beginning with *White Heat,* a psychological circumstance) that has coerced a capable, forceful man into extortion and

Barry Wetcher/HBO

The unexpected sex symbol

murder. Misprized innocence, relative to the gangster, is more complex than it is in domestic melodrama, since, clearly, the gangster *is* guilty at the most literal level. But though the screen gangster is depicted as not only legally culpable but also essentially corrupt by nature in all other categories of crime entertainment (with the possible exception of the lone outlaw category), in the true gangster film there shine through the Hollywood mobster's villainous deeds the remnants of what his initial innocence might have been like.

There is a longing in the gangster subgenre for its protagonist's lost purity, staged on the level of the physical, for the Hollywood gangster typically has an "innocent," spontaneous relationship to his body and physicality in general.[2] Almost all the action is written onto the bodies of the gangsters in a subgenre that places great emphasis on physical touch in general, on drinking, and sometimes on food. The infamous grapefruit-in-the-face scene in *Public Enemy* is as much a deeply embedded evocation of loss for Tommy as it is an abuse of Kitty. Tommy assaults Kitty because she is concerned about his welfare; apparently he needs to summon up considerable energy to deny that kind of filiation with anyone but his mother. In "The Sopranos" an overt consciousness of the relevance of food and touch to this genre is everywhere; but this is not a simple awareness: kisses and shared meals are both powerful and ambiguous signs, perhaps of connection, perhaps of betrayal and rejection.

Tony Soprano's rich physicality is a particularly important part of his characterization, a primary vehicle for our experience of his intricately marbled guilt and innocence. We know that he has a history behind him that pushes him involuntarily into mob life, and we also share his pleasure in the body of the world, in both its perverse and its sweet aspects, which makes a powerful suggestion to the audience that Tony, given other historical circumstances, could have been a very different person. Moreover, this physicality contrasts favorably with the unsatisfying, sterile aphysicality of the law-abiding citizens, which makes us feel that Tony had (or perhaps has) the potential to be much better than they are. Tony touches and is touched, a source of his immense appeal.

Despite his potbelly and balding head, James Gandolfini has become an unexpected sex symbol because of his frank involvement with the sensual body. He has made touch an integral part of Tony's management technique: embracing, kissing, shaking, and smacking the men whom he leads. Tony's relationship to food is unashamedly enthusiastic: not only is much business conducted by him over meals, but he appealingly expresses affection with food in a way that also expresses his power, as in a good-night ritual with his son when he sprays whipped cream from a can into his own mouth as a bedtime treat and then sprays some into his son's. The paternal and even maternal warmth that he displays is the positive side of his gangster tendency to understand the world in purely physical terms. The emphasis on Tony's body is also a seminal mode of representing his problematic allure. While he lives a life shockingly contained by physical orientation in which murder is just another form of saying "that's the way it is," the warmth of his engagement in the touchable world points up a lack—a physical coldness—in the characters who occupy a variety of moral and ethical positions. With this troubling irony, Chase permits sophisticated viewers a new insight into a fundamental aspect of what has always been the enigmatic attractiveness of gangsters. Certainly Tommy Powers is much more physically alive than his wooden, good, older brother Michael. We find the same contrast in many of Tony's predecessors.[3]

Tony Soprano's guilt of murder—and more—is complicated by the fact that he was born (did not choose) to rule the Northern New Jersey mob and by his utterly spontaneous, child-like joy in physicality.

The series follows in the footsteps of not only the great gang classics but also many important classics of American literature which represent the moral double bind. "The Sopranos" is as complex as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* in exploring the issues of innocence and crime; in contrast, the moralist critics of gangster film and television have shown themselves to be simplistic. Reductive criticism of the great media gangster classics has a venerable history, from the Production Code to Marge Roukema, though today's self-appointed censors fall short of the standards of yesteryear's. The critics of "The Sopranos" mainly raise their voices in horror at the violence and ethnic representation of Italian Americans, yet they fail to note critiques of so-called good citizens of all types that the old Production Code Administration would have been eager to condemn.[4]

"The Sopranos" portrays a broad spectrum of characters who are building lives as career criminals, and does so with explicit ethnic markings. This would have disturbed the PCA, but—and this might have been even more irritating to the old in-house censor—the series also depicts the sniveling hypocrisy of mainstream middle-class Caucasian professionals (clergy, teachers, lawyers, therapists, politicians, doctors), who are supposed to be guardians of the public sphere, but who are cowardly and morally derelict in varying ways. However, "The Sopranos" is not using the mob simply to make good citizens more thoughtful about their own compromised actions in the lawless climate of contemporary America. Rather, the series is trying for a much more profound interrogation of our blind spots relative to the pleasure we take in the infantile innocence of the gangster.

"Cunnilingus and Psychiatry Brought Us to This"

At the end of the first season, Tony Soprano tells wife Carmela, in the aftermath of the failed contract on his life, "Cunnilingus and psychiatry brought us to this"—a twentyfirst-century translation of "I'm not so tough." The "this" of this statement is the nub of the significance of this television series for the gangster tradition. For Tony, "this" expresses his exasperation with the strains modern life has placed on the gangster's macho code. However, for the viewer, "this" is the possibility inherent in modern life for a new understanding of the ambiguous charm of the gangster. Tony's mob issues are actually pretty standard, but they become new in "The Sopranos," which insightfully reconfigures the delicate balance between right, might, and delight that has historically made the gangster subgenre such a seething cauldron of unresolved drives. The series works episode by episode, season by season to establish a complex point of view that inevitably requires us to acknowledge, despite its power over us, the insufficiency of Tony's charm in the face of murder and other forms of social devastation.

Central to the series' revolutionary take on the appeal of the immediacy of the gangster is its revelation of a dark secret about family through a juxtaposition between the roles of Carmela and Dr. Melfi in Tony's life. Instead of comparing an innocent family with a guilty career, the series juxtaposes Tony's criminal activities with a family held together by his wife Carmela's unacknowledged, self-destructive attachment to the excitement and allure of Tony's violence, to which she is blinded by a reductive attitude toward religion that serves as a powerful form of denial rather than as a mode of fighting against evil. Only Melfi's psychiatry, with its ethical roots deeply anchored in a conscious connection with the beneficial aspects of the subconscious, can offer any hope of dealing with the attractions of the innocence (and power) of gangster spontaneity. In this, "The Sopranos" represents an impressive advance over both the rigid code of ethics and morals in the 1930s gangster film and the post-Code relativity instigated by Francis Ford Coppola, neither of which dealt honestly with its material.

The untenably simplistic nature of the Code rendered the "good people" one-dimensional and unintentionally made the gangsters seem more exciting and desirable. In post-studio Hollywood, post-Godfather gangster narratives tended to follow Coppola's simplistic lead in relativizing values, which ultimately disappeared into the maelstrom of Michael Corleone's id and ego, seemingly lost forever in the glamour of gang potency. In contrast, the old Hollywood definition of "good" people is severely challenged and the romanticizing of the gangster in the "Godfather" series is commented on in "The Sopranos," particularly in the second-season episode "Commeditori," when Tony and "the guys" go to Italy expecting the operatic glamour of Coppola's films, only to be disappointed by the putrefaction and emptiness under the pretty surfaces. The continuous thrust of "The Sopranos" is an examination of the way Americans (even gangsters themselves) are bedazzled by the same impulsive human desire that mesmerized Coppola. Chase deliberates the need to use our human capacity to mediate desire so as to allow for important longer-range needs and interests.

Tony's interlude with a family of wild ducks in the first episode, his pure delight in nature's gift to him, is the series' introduction of the problem of Tony's seductive "innocence." The ducks come to him literally out of the blue, bringing their natural bodies and their unsullied family behavior smack into the middle of his contradiction-ridden home and business life when they land in his backyard pool. The positioning of the ducks creates the maximum of complexity about Tony, coming as it does after a main title sequence that contains a mass of aggressively virile resonances: Tony Soprano returning home to New Jersey from New York, a huge cigar in his mouth, driving through a maze of evocations of masculine power in America—bridges, highways, electric wires, and industrial sites. The sequence is shot through the driver's POV, further emphasizing Tony's dominance as he negotiates the twists and turns. Aurally, the montage is scored by a guttural rendition of "Woke Up this Morning," a song with the refrain "Got yourself a gun."

These images immediately collide with Tony's position of subjective, child-like confusion in the psychiatrist's office and his discomfort as he meets Dr. Melfi for the first time. As he speaks with her, we see him suppressing the information about his violent operations and frolicking in his pool, like a delighted child, with a mother duck and her ducklings, clad only in an open robe and his boxer shorts. The entrance of the ducks into the analysis puts a strain on the already powerful imbalances of Tony's characterization.

These dissonances and contrasting fragments are bracketed by the linearity of Tony's conversation with Melfi. Unexpectedly, it is a curative rather than a repressive linearity that makes its first dent in Tony's macho defenses as he fulminates about the weakness involved in going to a psychiatrist. Melfi keeps him focused, finally thwarting his evasions as she insistently repeats the question, "Are you depressed?" He finally stops spinning his cover stories and answers reluctantly, "Yeah, since the ducks left." What to make of a protagonist who thrives on brutality and grieves for departed ducks? Ultimately, a great deal. For Tony's infantile obsession with the ducks is a distillation of his confusion about immediacy—a confusion shared by everyone in the show but his therapist—which he is able to sentimentalize and compartmentalize so that his worship of his own visceral responses blocks him from experiencing a mature sting of conscience about his life of crime.

Tony's retreat into Melfi's inner sanctum suggests that he can gain the needed insight, and this marks an enormous change in the life of the media gangster. Unlike Tommy Powers, Tony Soprano does not have to have his body destroyed in order to cut through his defenses. Unlike Henry Hill in *Goodfellas,* the gangster project Chase considers "the Bible" for his creation, Tony is not forever lost in the false glamour of the gangster life, in comparison with which ordinary life is a second-rate business that makes "schnooks" of all of us.[5] Tony has begun a quest that will slowly and with great pain, sorrow, and difficulty lead to other possibilities than the unthinking release of chaotic energy and false glamour that have locked previous gangsters into a doomed cycle of savagery. Not for one second does "The Sopranos" deny the moment-to-moment pleasure of the infantilized life that the American media gangster leads. But neither does the series fall into the moral confusion of the "Godfather" trilogy and its descendants, which are so enchanted by spontaneous pleasure that they have barely a shred of defense against the infantile, violent sprees of its protagonists. In a flash of insight, "The Sopranos" takes heed of that oddly seductive innocence in all its thrilling excitement and chilling myopia.

The characteristic myopia of Tony and his colleagues threads the series, continually provoking ambivalence about the gangster's spontaneity, one of the most revealing episodes being "Boca," the ninth of the first season. The episode weaves two stories, one about Uncle Junior's taste for cunnilingus and one about the sexual abuse of one of Meadow's (Tony's daughter) friends by Don Hauser, the coach of the girls' soccer team at Verbum Dei, Meadow's high school. "Boca," which means "mouth" in Italian, is also the nickname for Boca Raton, the upscale resort town in Florida to which Junior takes his main squeeze, Roberta "Bobbi" Sanfillipo, for some rest, recreation, and cunnilingus. The juxtaposition of Junior's time-out from the male world of the mob and the abuse story sets up a set of contrasts that suggest the problematic nature, not of Junior's particular and perfectly innocent sexual desire, but of its proscription by a male subculture that, ironically, enthusiastically endorses a wide variety of other instinctual drives that are dangerous and destructive. When Tony learns of Junior's sexual preferences, Junior has to terminate his relationship with Bobbi, and the reflection cast by the Hauser story pairs these events to imply that all aspects of the lives of the gangsters are occasions for male self-indulgence as long as they fit within the conventional macho image.

The soccer-coach thread begins as Tony and the other suburban gangster fathers and their satellites are beside themselves with joy at their daughters' triumph on the playing field. However, the thrill of victory fore-

Anthony Neste/HBO

Anthony Neste/HBO

The women in his life—Tony with his psychiatrist, Dr. Melfi, and (right) his wife, Carmela (Edie Falco)

grounds their male sense of dominance: they do not take their daughters out to celebrate; they take the coach for a drink at Bada Bing!, the topless bar where the Sopranos gang hangs out. Their infectious euphoria turns slightly unpalatable when it generates an equally spontaneous anger at the news that Hauser has negotiated a new and better contract and is leaving the school. Impulsive forms of intimidation to get him to stay escalate when the final shoe drops and it becomes clear that Hauser has sexually abused one of the girls on the team. Tony and his soldiers decide to kill him. This complicates audience relationships with the characters. The "good fellas" are suddenly not amusing, but frightening. Yet at the same time there is a nagging admiration for the gangsters: Who is not outraged by child molestation? Except that, cleverly, Chase makes us confront the problem of dealing with such rage spontaneously.

Tony is the fulcrum of this episode because only he, by virtue of the combination of his gangster power and his analysis with Melfi, can begin to mediate the huge energies in play. He finds himself unable to blithely indulge his instincts, to enjoy without reservation either the damage to Junior's reputation because of his pleasure in giving Bobbi pleasure or the plan to avenge the young girl by killing Hauser. The newly emerging Tony is no longer completely proof against doubt. He aborts the contract on Hauser primarily because Melfi asks him why he has to control everything after he heaps contempt on the solutions posed by what he sees as the ineffective legal and psychiatric communities: "Who's gonna stop him? You?" In the context established by the episode, it becomes clear to the audience and to Tony himself that he is motivated by some dubious needs of his own for control and domination in seeking to kill Hauser, and the enthusiastic endorsement of those needs by Tony's soldiers contrasts suspiciously with their proscription of Junior's sexuality. The physical spontaneity of cunnilingus is too openly emotional, too tender for the soldiers, sounding yet a further note of warning about the limitations of the lure of gangster immediacy. The warnings become ever more insistent, and awareness for both characters and audience grows as the series continues.

For Tony, there is a modicum of new insight because of Melfi's interventions. For the audience, though there is a certain attractiveness to Tony's take-charge position, since we know the problematic relationship

between legal justice and sex offenders, there is also a certain horror inherent in his propensity toward murder. When he finally cancels the hit, Tony feels neither liberated nor evolved, but rather radically out of control, and to commemorate the loss that ethical behavior inspires in him, he floods his system with alcohol and Prozac, babbling that he hasn't hurt anyone. Like Tony, the audience is and continues to be in a conflicted position in which it is difficult to reject either Melfi's moral stance with its long-range implications or the short-term immediacy of Tony's practical approach toward survival. Yet at the end of "Boca," Tony is at a tantalizingly different place from any gangster in the history of the subgenre, just because of psychiatry and cunnilingus.

This conflict is actively refracted in every transaction and relationship in the series, but particularly in the juxtaposition of Tony's wife and his therapist, by means of which the series makes its main contribution to the gangster project by breaking with both small-minded PCA moralism and the relativist "Godfather" phenomenon. Having profited from Coppola's infusion of a new vocabulary and a more overt portrayal of family and gangster vocation into the subgenre, Chase takes on the task of restoring values to mass-culture fiction about gangsters, but with an unprecedented complexity, and a new twist for the genre. The problematic nature of the joy associated with Tony's spontaneous virility is most uniquely confronted in the juxtaposition of Carmela's problematic, self-serving form of Catholicism and the painful integrity of Jennifer Melfi's commitment to our human relationship to the subconscious.

The old gangster tradition, in deference to the extremely conservative Catholicism of the men who governed the Production Code Administration, would ritually haul out a highly idealized, cardboard impersonation of a priest to pass harsh judgement on the infectious excitement of the gangster mayhem. Ironically, this worked nicely to liberate audiences from their ordinary limits by permitting them to enjoy the gangster while taking in the obligatory pieties at the same time. The "Godfather" series exploded this disguise not only by implicating the Church as a financial dependent of the Corleones, but also by cross-cutting between Michael's role in the baptism of his nephew and his "family's" role in the killing of the principal members of the rival mobs. As Michael is being asked, "Do you renounce Satan?" his will is being carried out by numerous assassins, a chilling evocation of the Church as the house of Satan in this world. With the Church unmasked as a fraud, and with no other source of values in *The Godfather,* the vitality of the gangster assumes an uncontested sovereignty in the film. In contrast, David Chase also envisions a corrupt Church financially beholden to the mob, but "The Sopranos," by placing Tony between Carmela and Dr. Melfi, raises to the surface from the depths of the gangster tradition the possibilities of human allegiance to ethics by taking heed of the energy of the subconscious.

The subconscious, along with the Catholic Church, has always played a role, albeit a shadowy one, in the gangster subgenre, but never before as a potential source of values. It has always lurked as the negative source from which gangsters draw nervous energy and the reason they are subject to fits. After World War II, the psychology of criminal behavior became more explicit, as in *White Heat,* which linked Cody Jarrett's (James Cagney) migraine headaches to his incestuous relationship with his mother, and ostensibly both to his propensity for violence. After *The Godfather,* interestingly, abnormal psychology was relegated to the lesser gangsters, Vito and Michael Corleone becoming the templates for the gangster as hero in a totally degenerate society. But the TV series casts a cold eye on Tony's belief that he is of the latter type, and suggests his lack of connection to subconscious energies.

The juxtaposition of Carmela and Dr. Melfi highlights the melodrama of Tony's choices, not a sexual choice—the cliché of sexual competition between women is present only if it is imposed by a clichéd reading of the series—but a choice of values: Carmela's travesty of morality that actually enables Tony to continue in a life of crime, or Melfi's honest confrontation of the subconscious that might aid him in coping with the infantile charms of criminal mayhem. That Carmela is married to the mob works on more than one level. She is, in many ways, an allegory for the confusion in the general American public about deviance. A devoted mother, with a sincere concern for other people and community as she understands it, she is nevertheless unaware that she is sexually excited by transgressive behavior, and especially by violence. Endlessly tinkering with her Catholicism to calm her conscience, her piety is explicitly revealed, in part, as self-deception by her sexuality. She becomes aroused with Tony only in response to his criminal behavior. When he brings home a stolen fur coat, she expresses her appreciation by initiating sex: fascinatingly, she is the partner on top. In an even more chilling sequence, utterly unprecedented in gangster lore, Carmela initiates unusually warm and tender sex when Tony, in an episode entitled "From Where to Eternity," returns

from murdering a 23-year-old boy. This is not a deed that Tony has explicitly mentioned to her, but the sequences before and after indicate that she knows the basics of his intent, a situation that patently horrifies and arouses her. It is noteworthy that her physical approach to Tony is linked to the infantilization that the worship of immediacy spawns; she caresses his face and body as a mother might caress a baby. In fact, Tony's relationship to his home stresses the infantile; he spends a disproportionate amount of time in his bed, like a baby in his crib (as Henry Bronchtein, the director of the episode, has noted).[6] Tony's home is not built in opposition to his gang life, but on a disguised attraction to the "bad boy" energy of the criminal.

The audience too would like to stay in its crib, fiercely fighting against what Chase reveals about Tony through the polarities inherent in Carmela and Melfi. Chat rooms buzz with audience desire to get lost in erotic fantasies about Tony with both women. But the series relentlessly chips away at those fantasies, revealing some hard home truths about sexual attraction/repulsion concerning Tony. Chase links Carmela's morality to an infantilized relationship with the Church through her psychosexual liaison with the parish priest, Father Philip Intintola. (It says much about this character that his name—if you say it quickly, which they all do—sounds like "Rin-Tin-Tin.") Father Phil spends cozy evenings with Carmela in front of the Home Entertainment Center. He even spends the night once, ostensibly for practical reasons, while Tony is away, and they have a close brush with sex. But, as Carmela realizes and tells Father Phil, he has made a life work of arousing needy women, and enjoying the whiff of sexuality without following through. Would that Carmela could turn her formidable insights on herself. Even in the third season, when she can no longer endure her own complicity with the poisoned wellsprings of her affluence, she escapes into rhapsodies about the innocence of the Baby Jesus in paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art—her version of Tony's fixation on the ducks. And when she consults a psychologist, who bluntly refuses to let her pay him with what he calls Tony's blood money and tells her that her only productive recourse is to leave her husband, Carmela decides that this Jewish doctor "can't understand" the Catholic attitude toward marriage. Chase contextualizes this attitude in a less than flattering light when Carmela accepts the counsel of a priest (not Father Intintola), who insists that she honor the sacrament of marriage by taking from the marriage only that which isn't tainted by Tony's criminal activities—a stunning exercise in sophistry that continues to lock Carmela into her painful dynamic with Tony and results in no more than a renunciation of some flashy jewelry.

Barry Wetcher/HBO

Carmela—devoted to family, and married to the mob

Chase also frustrates the fantasies that the audience wants to cultivate about Dr. Melfi. Although there is some subtextual sexual interest aroused in Jennifer Melfi by Tony Soprano, she, in contrast to Carmela, is prepared to deal with and fight it. Paying what must be one of the highest compliments ever accorded psychiatry on television, Chase suggests that beyond the clichés that associate permissiveness with therapeutic treatment—clichés Tony periodically hurls in Melfi's face—there exists a core in the psychiatric process that fosters an honesty about the attractions of the gangster way of life that may be our only hope, even if it cannot promise a complete solution to the problem.

From the moment Tony Soprano first enters Dr. Melfi's office, he continually attempts to ensnare her in the exercise of raw power that passes for sexuality and even love among the women with whom he deals. (It passes for love between Tony and the men too.) Often his displays toward her take an "adorable" child-like

form of impetuousness, impulsiveness, spontaneity, and socially immature gestures—putting his feet up on her coffee table and flapping them back and forth, for example. But Tony's attempts to create a crib away from home for himself are not successful. Melfi will not give in to any of his gangster erotics—sudden attempts to kiss her, attempts to extend the protection of his power to her—or to his belief that violence can change the truth. His declaration of love in the first season is met with her calm analytical approach to transference. When he learns that she needs repairs on her car, he "steals" it and takes it to his own mechanic, thinking this will be a romantic surprise. But Melfi confounds him by insisting that he will receive credit on his bill for the cost. She does let him get her and her date a table at a crowded restaurant to prevent a scene, but when he threatens her with extreme physical violence at her analytical suggestion that his mother is behind the attempt on his life, she leaves him to deal with the doubts she has encouraged, doubts that cannot just be pounded into submission.

When Tony's violent way of life reaches into Melfi's life, forcing her to go into hiding, she terminates her association with him on what she assures him is a permanent basis. There seems to be no temporizing on her part, as there is on Carmela's, until in the middle of the second season, plagued by dreams about abandoning him, she decides to resume his therapy despite the urgent pleas of her therapist ex-husband, Richard La Penna (Richard Romanus), and her control psychiatrist, Eliot Kupferberg (Peter Bogdanovich), to stay away from a person they deem a dangerous sociopath. Their doubts stand unanswered in the second season: Is Melfi in the process of giving in to her own adolescent longings about Tony?

In the third-season episode "Employee of the Month," we must come to the conclusion that Melfi has important, mature, professional—not personal and infantile—reasons for continuing to treat Tony. The show, primarily about the rape of Dr. Melfi by Jesus Rossi (employee of the month at the local fast-food restaurant that she patronizes), quashes the innocence of spontaneity within the violent context. While Carmela has permitted violence to be hidden and eroticized, the violence in Melfi's life is too available in all its ugliness to evoke anything but horror. Rossi's attack on Melfi is a motiveless hatred unleashed on her in a spur-of-the-moment urge, the worst aspect of spontaneity unmasked. Even for the audience, which (given the evidence of the chat rooms) was charmed by Tony and Carmela's post-murder bedroom scene, this is an act impossible to romanticize. Melfi's demeanor is utterly businesslike as she descends a metal staircase in a cinderblock stairwell, a surrounding devoid of any sensual ambience, when Rossi assaults her. Her response is an unambiguous struggle to escape him. For the audience, trained by decades of gangster lore, sentimentalization is displaced onto its yearning for this terrible moment to foster in Melfi a desire to turn toward Tony as her protector and avenger.

A selective interpretation of the episode can suggest that this is a desire encouraged by the show. The police have casually released Rossi because of procedural snafus, and there is no one but Tony who can give Melfi the immediate gratification of vengeance. Melfi feels the same childish impulses to avail herself of that solace: she finds herself yelling at Dr. Kupferberg with the same rage that Tony yelled at her when she suggested that Hauser be turned over to the police instead of dispatched by efficient mob execution, "That employee of the month cocksucker is back on the street, and who's gonna stop him, you?" But a more comprehensive understanding of events reveals that the show raises this desire in order to reject it. Despite her rage, Melfi's use of Tony to avenge her is restricted to the world of the imagination—the proper use for a gangster fantasy. It is important that Chase does not construct her as being above the desire to throw herself on Tony's mercy, for it reflects the audience's divided position. Indeed, Melfi is overtaken by a spasm of fear during a therapy session with Tony, which upsets him to the point that he intrudes on the distance between analyst and patient by walking over to comfort her. The moment is filled with unspoken feelings and ideas as Tony searches Melfi's bruised face for some clue to this unprecedented outburst, and Melfi wrestles silently with a decision that has hovered over this episode. "What? Do you want to say something?" asks Tony, genuinely concerned, expressing the tenderness that is embedded in his rich access to physical immediacy. The camera lingers on Melfi's now impassive swollen and bruised face. "No," she says, and the episode cuts abruptly, with finality, to black. Tony's momentarily naïve openness cannot be accepted because of its place in a much larger constellation of unacceptable behavior.

In raising our fantasies that Tony will be Melfi's hero, and then dramatizing her ethical rejection of that childish romanticism about gangsters, "The Sopranos" as a postmillennial gangster entertainment stakes out the highest ground yet claimed by any production in this subgenre, if complexity is a measure of ethical value. It refuses to make things easy for us. On an emotional level, all people in this series are equal. Tony

has many a genuine and profound emotional response. Even the most brutal and heedless of the gangsters might have one now and again. Yet if the human common denominator of intense feeling is a basis for occasional empathy and identity with characters, that empathy does not become a substitute for ethics in this series. A true melodrama, "The Sopranos" stages the innocence of its protagonist: Tony has a certain purity of heart. But that innocence is more troubling than in previous gangster melodramas.

"The Sopranos" proclaims, and loudly, that if the innocence of bodily immediacy is attractive, still that is not enough. Tony's disregard for ethics and law cannot be condoned because of his spontaneous, generous charm. Carmela represents that untenable attitude of the mass audience excited by the lies unspoken, while Melfi will not lose herself in them, although at times—to quote Sam Spade—everything in her wants to. This is no valentine, as Mario Puzo's novel is to Vito Corleone.[7] Nor is it an arch wink at the joke the gangster world has played on straitlaced America, as in Richard Condon's "Prizzi" series.[8] David Chase and his creative community are inviting us to be very adult in our consideration of the crime culture and very sophisticated about its role as a metaphor for the tangled desires of our daily lives.[9] We might even say that with "The Sopranos," mass culture comes of age as entertainment provides a truly popular examination of important popular realities. Would a public that could learn the lesson Tony offers continue voting for presidential candidates on the basis of a perceived warmth and spontaneity that annihilates known facts about the insufficiency of their administrative records and/or unacceptable ideological commitments?

Martha P. Nochimson's most recent book is *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2*. She is working on a study of gangster films in Hollywood and Hong Kong.

Notes

1. Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History,* ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 42.
2. In the gangster subgenre, the spontaneous body of the gangster protagonist is always rendered appealing; in other genres of crime entertainment, where the gangster is an antagonist, that spontaneity is generally rendered repulsive; indeed, it is often inscribed as a nauseating violation of cleanliness, proportion, and order. It is no accident that James Cagney, a dancer, was so effective in gangster films: the attractions of his lithe, feline, grace set him apart from the wooden, if morally correct, bodies of the good men and the slothful, obdurate bodies of lesser gangsters.
3. In non-gangster crime entertainment, the coolness of the policeman's body is often one of his central attractions; the heat of the gangster's body being associated with putrefaction and fetidity. Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry is a prime example. Humphrey Bogart's physical coolness is also the center of his character when he fights crime, a hallmark that made him in many ways a more memorable lawman than he was a criminal. But in the gangster subgenre, the physical coolness of the lawmen is asexual, antiseptic rather than enticing. In "The Sopranos," the police and the FBI are much in evidence, and, for the most part, are of unquestionable integrity. Accordingly, they are clean-cut, if somewhat indistinguishable from each other. Their cool detachment from their job, in which there is no personal body, works similarly against audience empathy with their plans to get evidence on Tony, even if we know that it is the right thing to do.
4. Marge Roukema, a conservative Republican Congresswoman who admits to never having seen the show, is representative of a myopia about the show's ethical complexity.
5. An unrepentant Henry Hill, in the witness protection program at the end of *Goodfellas,* mourns the loss of "the good life": "We were treated like movie stars with muscle. We had it all just for the asking. . . . We ran everything. We paid off cops, we paid off judges. . . . Everything was for the taking. And now it's all over. And that's the hardest part. . . . I have to wait around like everyone else. . . . I'm an average nobody, get to live the rest of my life like a schnook." The film gives us no reason to second-guess Henry; it implies the existence of nothing that is as worthwhile in life as having "everything for the taking."
6. Henry J. Bronchtein, Commentary, "From Where to Eternity," Disc 3, *The Sopranos, The Complete Second Season,* DVD, HBO Home Video, 2001.
7. Mario Puzo, *The Godfather* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1969). Puzo's novel depends on a fantasy medieval, personal hierarchy, in which Vito rises to the top because his supremely warm, generous instincts and mental acuteness enable him to manage the affairs of human beings while the abstract legal system flounders. It is a profoundly relativistic book that idealizes men who "know how to use violence," the tone of which is perfectly translated to the screen by Francis Ford Coppola.
8. Richard Condon's "Prizzi" trilogy is an elaborate joke about the United States, proposing the gangster as the quintessential American: a person with absolutely portable ethics and identity, rooted in nothing but the exigencies required for success. The trenchant irony of the tale speaks of the blindness of American society from a perspective outside of American relativism that locates the trilogy as an ethical statement. *Prizzi's Honor* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1982); *Prizzi's Family* (New York: Putnam, 1986); *Prizzi's Glory* (New York: Dutton, 1988).
9. Although the "Sopranos" online chat rooms give no evidence of a broad spectrum of sophisticated viewers, they also give no indication that the fears of the would-be censors are justified. The enthusiastic participants do not express negative attitudes about ethnic groups, nor do they seem to lose respect for cultural institutions; in fact quite the reverse. By and large, the audience is intrigued by questions of loyalty to family and among "soldiers," although they are also swept up by sexual interest in the obvious objects of desire: Tony, Dr. Melfi, and Carmela.

Rebecca M. Gordon

Portraits Perversely Framed

Jane Campion and Henry James

By and large, critics who became enamored with Jane Campion for *Sweetie, An Angel at My Table, The Piano,* and her handful of short films, responded ambivalently to her *Portrait of a Lady*. According to some, the dubious decision to make a Hollywood-style film, worse still an adaptation, caught Campion dallying in the deep waters of "literary" cinema, "coarsening" her vision as a result.[1] Certainly Campion made a bid for the mainstream with this picture. Lush mises-en-scène satisfy "Masterpiece Theatre" tastes, while Campion's signature camerawork and clinical exploration of sexuality titillate audiences who can glimpse the leisured class of the late nineteenth century and be rapt by its repression. The film oozes money and high production values as much as James's characters ooze money and psychological perversities. Appearing in 1996 on the heels of a spate of Jane Austen film adaptations and during a surge of American and British "literary" films (*The Crucible, The English Patient, Hamlet, Romeo & Juliet*), Campion's contribution looks suspiciously like an opportunity to cash in on the vogue for films based on the classics.

Choosing the notoriously unfilmable Henry James novel also seemed, to several critics, ill advised. *The Portrait of a Lady* marked James's decisive departure from more conventionally "realist" novels to works that were "realistic" in the accuracy of their psychological explorations of character. The failure of many television and film adaptations of James's works, for instance *Daisy Miller* and *The Bostonians,* accurately to grasp the sensibility of his psychological freeze frames and complex metaphors, despite their pictorial or theatrical qualities, is proof for many critics of how unsuited James is to cinema. In choosing to interpret James through a graphic sexuality that unlocks the repressions in his novel, Campion instead fell prey to the double charge of using eroticism for big-screen success and of thereby reducing James's expansive view of human nature and human consciousness to a narrow strand of body-oriented feminism. Some reviewers have even found her film to be less feminist than James's novel.

Yet in spite of these criticisms, something other than a high-toned costume drama is at issue here. As much as Campion's career has progressed from art-school pieces to features that look to the cynical eye like calculated shots at bankability, her films have also remained deeply invested in the marginal—in representing what remains for the most part unrepresented. And she continues to investigate subject matter that James himself consistently found vital: the inner life, internal drama, perversion, and melodrama.

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The working of this young lady's spirit was strange,
and I can only give it to you as I see it,
not hoping to make it seem altogether natural.
—Henry James, THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Jamesian Melodrama/ Campionesque Critical Melodrama

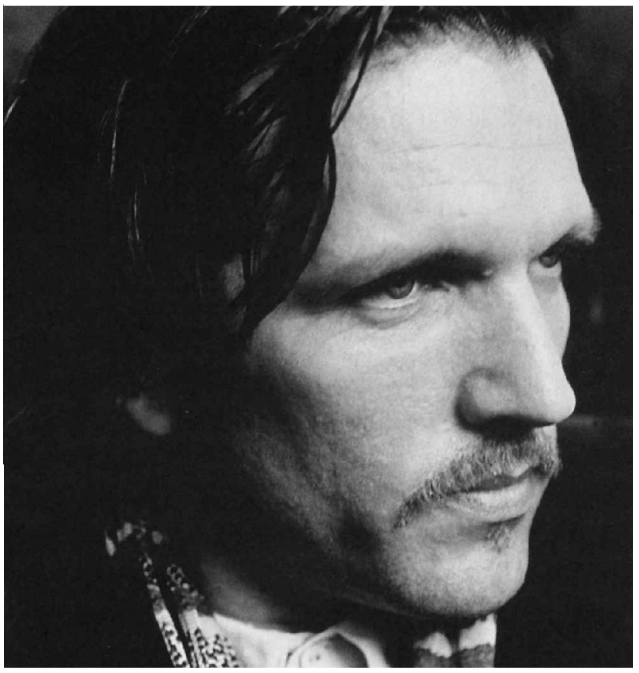
James was fascinated by the melodramatic theater's ability to evoke emotional and moral responses from its audience, and wished to evoke similar conscious perceptions through his writing. By utilizing scenes and situations in plots that were themselves melodramatic, James attempted to show rather than tell the meaning of the story, thereby "pressing upon the consciousness" of his readers. Stylistic flamboyance and emotional excess are the recurrent features of melodramas, even in James's subtle, highly literary versions. But melodrama is also historically specific; according to Sue Harper, it exhibits "a variety of relationships between narrative codes, and a range of 'permitted' gratifications will be distributed throughout a text in different ways."[2] James used melodramatic forms to pit moral and ethical choices against each other; those moral and ethical conflicts would have seemed irremediable to his fin-de-siècle contemporaries. Richard Blackmuir has observed that James's elaborate style "rendered shades and refinements of meaning and feeling not usually rendered at all." Likewise, the characters he created to dramatize his feelings have "sometimes a quality of intelligence which enables them to experience matters which are unknown and seem almost perverse to the average reader."[3]

While James approaches the deeply familiar novel and its characters and renders them "strange," Campion renders that strangeness visible. Like James's novels, Campion's films attempt to communicate states of mind, particularly women's states of mind, to her audience. However, Campion tells her melodramatic stories through an unorthodox cinematic style in order to show us *our psychological selves now*. By exhibiting still-familiar moral and ethical choices as sexual repressions and perversions in costume, Campion "shows" the spaces where traditional gender ideology fails, suggesting the places where it has always failed, and thus creating a gap in our film-audience sense of reality. The result is a loosening of the gender codes upon which the very pleasure of melodrama rests. Campion's film might even be considered, for that reason, anti-melodrama. Discernible in *The Portrait of a Lady* is Campion's desire to draw from James's novel a pleasurable feminist narrative, attractive to the mainstream, which can also prick its audience's conscience.

Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones approach James's novel through an informed knowledge of James's work and James criticism. In press kits, interviews, and on the covers of CDs and screenplays, they refer to James's letters and prefaces to explain writerly or directorial decisions, thus announcing their intention to interpret, rather than adapt, the novel. Feminist and psychoanalytic concerns about James, in particular, resonate in their comments. Campion seems especially drawn to William Gass's response to the novel: "*The Portrait of a Lady* is James's first fully exposed case of human manipulation; of what it means to be a consumer of persons, and of what it means to be a person consumed."[4]

James criticism has generally fallen into two categories: "pure" or formal criticism, which concentrates on James's technique; or "social" criticism, which investigates the social or political ideology in his subject matter.[5] James himself, however, as Alan Shelston observes, insisted in his own critical writings on "the primacy of form and its inextricable relationship to content."[6] Where form and content come together in

Above and opposite: Nicole Kidman as Isabel Archer



Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett

James is in his use of melodramatic tropes. This, I think, was Campion's cue.

Henry James was fascinated with the techniques of the thriller and the form of the well-made play. From the beginning of his career he held that the immediacy of drama was superior to the merely verbal and intellectual representations of fiction. In the mid-1950s, Leo Levy investigated James's use of dramatic forms in his plays and early novels to demonstrate how essential the particular dramatic pattern of melodrama was to the Jamesian mode of perceiving and organizing moral experience. Peter Brooks, in his efforts to justify the melodrama as a source of inspiration for Balzac and James, historicized the melodramatic mode, recasting many of the features of nineteenth-century melodrama. He argued that melodrama, long derided as feminine, bourgeois, and the antithesis of tragedy and realism, was a specifically modern form that developed in response to the consequences of bourgeois social order. Brooks traced in James's work a transmutation of the form from active, "external" melodramas to brooding, "internal" melodramas. Direct representation (as for example in James's early novel *Watch and Ward*) became indirect mode, or the "melodrama of consciousness" (for example, *The Portrait of a Lady*). This change in approach revealed James's growing concern for a mode of expression that, unlike bourgeois realism, would allow the articulation of a moral universe and "the recognition of the diabolical forces which inhabit our . . . inner being."[7]

Central to the melodramatic mode, then, is a very Freudian sense of psychic need meeting ideological need. Repression is also central, because, to quote Christine Gledhill, "bourgeois society's orientation to the 'reality principle' . . . also stimulates demands for personal significance and value, and for acknowledgement of all that cannot be contained within the dominant order," including antisocial desire, dreams, the uncanny, and the struggle of good and evil.[8] Brooks's intention was the reevaluation of a form rather than an ideological analysis, but, as Gledhill explains, his work had an impact on concurrent developments in film theory, and was particularly pertinent to feminist film theorists confronting the problem of recuperating film melodramas from obscurity and disdain. In the 1970s, neo-Marxist and Freudian criticism of Hollywood film read melodrama against the grain of classic realist texts—that is, classic realist film texts. The stylistic excesses of melodrama, in these analyses, exposed fissures between a mainstream film's aesthetic and its apparent ideological investments, allowing the film to be read for its covert critique of the status quo. Melodrama, it appeared, had radical potential; the question for feminists was how to harness it.

One avenue was psychoanalysis. If the melodrama's specialty was generational and gender conflict, verisimilitude demanded that the central issues of sexual difference and identity be "realistically" represented. But those are precisely the issues realism is designed to repress; hence, the siphoning of unrepresentable material into excessive mise-en-scène. From this perspective, however, the radical potential of melodrama lay not in further exposure of fissures in the bourgeois status quo—always a problem for women's films since "the bourgeois" and "the feminine" were so often paralleled or even conflated in critiques of popular culture. Rather, the radical potential lay "in the possibility that the 'real' conditions of psychic and sexual identity might . . . press too close to the surface and break the reassuring unity of the classic realist narrative."[9]

Significantly, Campion and Jones worked from the 1908 New York edition of *Portrait,* which reveals a far more conscious Isabel than the original 1881 edition, as demonstrated by Anthony Mazzella.[10] Indeed, Campion and Jones take the crucial liberty of setting up Isabel as the film's center of consciousness, whisking that office away from Ralph Touchett. Isabel Archer believes, and repeatedly asserts her belief, that she is an

independent young woman; but at the heart of James's novel there resonates a question about the very definition of the term "independence" for a woman. Even though James restricts Touchett's consciousness (in both 1881 and 1908) by limiting how much he knows of Isabel's thoughts, were she directly adapted the film audience would still see Isabel's world through Ralph's eyes rather than Isabel's. Isabel must be more accessible to the audience in order for it to understand her situation as James understood it: as inevitable rather than preventable.

Confronted with the difficulty of visually representing Isabel's internal receptivity and interior development, Campion reverses the terms of James's text while preserving his basic meanings. Presenting Isabel as a portrait rather than as a complete subject, the film traces her social development and its effects on her outer person through costume and hair changes. Drawing from James's images and her own cinematic repertoire, Campion uses lighting, mobile framing, and swift changes of point of view to trace as closely as possible both the internal drama of Isabel's mind and the reactions other characters have to her. Point of view is perhaps the most perplexing and diffuse element of the film, just as it is in James's novel (where the restricted consciousness of his narrator can shift from the inner consciousness of Ralph Touchett to that of Gilbert Osmond, yet remain puzzled by Isabel Archer's motivations). Though Campion's film posits Isabel as its center of consciousness, Isabel's range of knowledge is more restricted than that of the audience, whose point of view shifts as Campion's interpretation of the narrative demands.

Sexualizing Costume Melodrama

Campion's boldest interpretive move is her decision to dramatize the unconscious sexual desires that riddle James's novel. She conveys sexual states of mind in order to critique Isabel's affront to her destiny. The results are mixed, for though Campion has taken her audience back to the nineteenth century and exposed the lie of Victorian sexual repression before (in *The Piano*), she is now working explicitly with someone else's text, and with characters whose sexuality is more fiercely tied to moral and ethical choices than is that of the characters Campion created herself. (Jane Campion has, of course, expressed her immense debt to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* in creating *The Piano*; indeed, she has called the film her "homage" to the Brontes.)

Early in James's novel, Isabel rejects the attentions of an American suitor, Caspar Goodwood, who has followed her to Europe. The two exchange a farewell handshake that is "not entirely passive on her side"; James then has a trembling Isabel fall to her knees beside her four-posted bed. She rejoices "intensely" that Goodwood is gone, but in addition to her relief, also feels "a thing to be ashamed of—it was profane and out of place": "it might be feared" that in part her tremor "was simply the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power."[11]

Campion takes a decidedly different approach. In the film, Goodwood not only clasps Isabel's hand, he attempts to trap her against a wall; he brushes her jaw with his hand, and Isabel (Nicole Kidman) physically—psychically—reacts as if burned. She responds this way throughout the film: men's caresses give her a visceral pleasure that conveys itself to the audience. After shutting the door on him, Isabel moves her fingers across her neck, contemplating the touch of Caspar's hand, caresses her face against the canopy fringe, and lowers herself onto the bed. The camera follows.

There, while the light of the room warms from purple-gray twilight to golden, Isabel imagines Caspar Goodwood looming over her, kissing her; then, with the camera panning down her body, Lord Warburton—Isabel's English pursuer—appears, pushing up her skirts while passionately stroking her knee. Finally the camera finds Ralph Touchett lying on his side, watching an ecstatic Isabel enjoy the caresses of the other two men. He whispers "I love you," but this is the last thing Isabel wants to hear from anyone, even in her imagination. Startled, she rises from the bed; the men rise as well. While Isabel looks to each, first Ralph, then Warburton and Goodwood disappear in shimmering glimmers.

Clearly Campion is playing, yet her game asks serious questions. In particular, she interrogates the fear that James ascribes to Isabel and that other critics have assumed of her: a fear of herself. In James's novel, Isabel Archer is indeed afraid of her power, even as she thrills to it. Campion's translation concedes that Isabel is shocked by the physical power of her passions, but her screen Isabel is only actually frightened when Ralph Touchett declares himself. Furthermore, the Isabel Campion has created does not feel shame. Instead of putting Isabel in James's posture of confession (on her knees beside her bed), the film allows her to enjoy her thrills, while at the same time, since the men are, after all, glowing phantasms, Campion puts the lie to James: This is silly. The scene is silly, Isabel

is silly in her overvaluation of herself, but so is it silly of James to have imagined Isabel as a kneeling nun, embarrassed by her desire. Shame is the symptom of repressed sexuality, which Campion treats with a halogen beam. Shame is also the symptom of an internalized sense of what women "should" be and do, a sense that Isabel, in Campion's interpretation, does not feel.[12] Campion also excises from James's passage any censure of Isabel for feeling power over men. Isabel's fantasies are the extent of her ability to "indulge her love of liberty" even though "it appeared to her that she had done something: she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory . . . she had done what was truest to her plan."[13] Isabel's power, Campion seems to say, is minimal. To show how minimal it is, the men will rise and disappear at once, the music will end, and the golden glow will return to twilight.

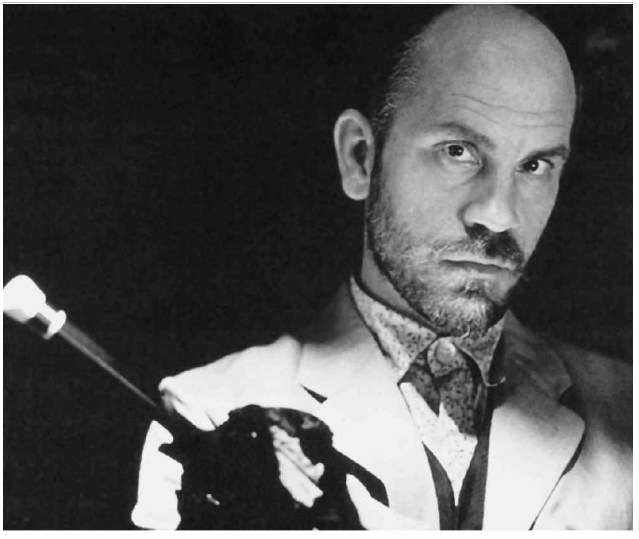
Critiquing Melodramatic States of Mind

The core of James's melodrama and Campion's film is the triangular relationship between Isabel Archer, Gilbert Osmond, and Madame Merle.[14] Isabel is at the mercy of the former lovers and co-conspirators, but the film's Isabel seems at even greater risk, and far less culpable, than James's heroine. Despite her oft-stated independence and desire to find her own way, Isabel is afraid to look into "unlighted corners"—those in her own mind and in other peoples'—preferring not to know what might emerge. Campion's Isabel seems unaware that these dark corners even exist. This is dangerous. For James, the greatest tragedy a character can experience is unawareness, for it leaves one absolutely vulnerable both to other people and to the less noble workings of one's own psyche.

Led to his American prey by the charming, if disposable, Madame Merle, Gilbert Osmond is precisely the sort of sterile dilettante who will collect Isabel, show her off, and stunt her mind, but whom Isabel is likely to marry under an illusion of romance. Literary critics have pictured their relationship as the doomed ship of two egos, as a sado-masochistic pairing, as Isabel's comeuppance, and as Isabel's undeserved fate. Campion, however, reads Isabel's attraction to Osmond as the effect of careful manipulation; literally, of hypnosis.[15]

Whereas James stages Isabel and Osmond's most important encounter late at night in the lobby of a shabby hotel in Rome, suggesting a certain seediness, Campion sets the scene in the august Capitoline Museum. She takes advantage of cinema's mobility, evoking Isabel's restlessness and physical reactions to emotional stimuli. Isabel leaves her sightseeing party to fetch a parasol from the subterranean vault. Osmond materializes out of the shadows in Isabel's path, walking toward her, twirling her striped parasol like a Mesmerist. When close enough, he whispers, "I'm absolutely in love with you." A massive cut throws the audience far from the lovers, behind them and to their left. Sweeping around the curve of the vault's wall, a fast dolly rushes the camera back to them again. Isabel is clearly endangered by her own radically shifting emotions; however, she cannot identify the source of her danger as Osmond himself. James, at this point,

Barbara Hershey as Madame Merle



John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond

describes Isabel as feeling a great dread—the dread of having to choose and decide. But Campion's Isabel seems more curious and excited than full of dread; she does not retreat, as she did from Ralph Touchett's (film) declaration. Rather, she both yields and resists while Osmond circles her. As he does so, the camera moves continuously, offering his point of view to convey the pleasure of capturing Isabel, and offering Isabel's point of view to convey the challenge of trying to fathom him.

Ralph Touchett, guilty and frightened at having assumed his cousin would be canny enough to see through Osmond's seduction unaided, attempts to convince her that marrying Osmond would be a huge mistake. Isabel, seen in a stable suggestively crossed by iron bars, sweetly tells Ralph she shouldn't mind giving up her freedom if she liked her (matrimonial) cage. From center screen in long shot, Isabel rhapsodically defends Osmond, telling Ralph that he is "under a false idea." Slowly, the camera tracks backward, away from Isabel; it is too late for her to be warned. The scene is metacinematic—we cannot help but know we are watching a movie. The effect is both to push Isabel farther away from the audience's sympathy and to press the issue of her unawareness of her mistake. In the following scene, she hangs on Osmond's sleeve, blindly sympathetic to his worries that her family will perceive his marriage proposal as an act of fortunehunting—a possibility that Isabel, in her innocence and pride, does not even guess at in the film, though she has acute feelings about it in the novel.

The Idea of Violence Made Flesh

Though the film retains its mobile camera and odd compositions throughout, the stable scene marks a narrative crisis whose repercussions carry through the rest of the film at the level of style. The lighting, while almost natural, remains a touch too blue or too gold; like Osmond's perversity, something is just slightly off. What James leaves as suggestive visual details, Campion grips with steel talons, making the grimness of Isabel's situation "show." A portent—a cloud of black birds darkening the sky—opens the second half of the film: "Rome: Three Years Later." Isabel has visibly become a younger version of Madame Merle: her clothes are richer, her hair is darker, tightly wound, and jeweled. Clearly Madame Merle has had a powerful impact.[16] The ornate mise-en-scène of his house symbolizes Osmond's decadence. He soon reveals himself as thoroughly conventional and narrow-minded; the

Capturing Isabel

behavior Isabel thought "small and quiet" indicates nothing but concern for other people's opinions.

Not only is Isabel's marriage false, it is psychologically and, as interpreted by Campion, physically violent. Having diluted Osmond's complexity for the sake of brevity, Campion heightens his physicality, taking her cues directly from the text. "Violence was somewhere," writes James, and "the idea of violence"; Campion opts to put it on the screen.[17] Under Gilbert's "evil eye," Isabel develops a "habit of covert observation" for her own "self-defense": she has "learned caution."[18] She no longer peers at people but glances, rarely making eye contact with anyone. The trope of Isabel reflected by or looking into mirrors, shots which sutured the viewer to Isabel's point of view, disappear from the film; instead, slow-motion shots of Isabel in silhouette before heavy gates, of her dress ruffle swishing along the ground, or of her face in multiple exposure wash across the screen. Dropped into the film at regular intervals, these shots act as temporal and psychological markers of Isabel's realization of her misery, a process that gradually accelerates.

The narrative thrust of the latter part of James's novel is Osmond's wish that Isabel should prompt Lord Warburton to propose to his daughter, Pansy. However, Warburton leaves Rome before proposing. Osmond blames Isabel for this dashing of his hopes. What transpires in the novel is a scene ripped straight from stage melodrama:

> "Where's the letter you told me he had written me?" her husband demanded.
>
> "I haven't the least idea; I haven't asked him."
>
> "You stopped it on the way," said Osmond.

> Isabel slowly got up; standing there in her white cloak, which covered her to her feet, she might have represented the angel of disdain, first cousin to that of pity. "Oh, Gilbert, for a man who was so fine—!" she exclaimed in a long murmur.[19]

Campion's Isabel is dressed in brown; her hair falls out of its coiffure. Osmond picks her up and forcibly sits her on a pile of cushions to interrogate her. She does not glide out of the room in white with a candle, but rather staggers out. And as she leaves, Gilbert steps on her train, making her fall. When she stands up again he mashes his beard fiercely into her face, but then puts his hand on her cheek as if to kiss her. She responds, slightly, to this tenderness; as soon as she does, Osmond drops his hand.

Shot mostly from overhead at a slightly canted angle, the scene forces viewers into an eerily omniscient point of view; we become voyeurs of a scene of domestic violence. The film provokes in the audience a sense of being implicated, as it did during Isabel's bedroom fantasy. As soon as she wavers toward Osmond's hand, there is an impulse to blame her for her own situation; but the canted angle nullifies any straight spectatorial point of view, including a spectatorial opinion of what, exactly, is happening—after all, this is a private occasion. A medium close-up of Isabel crying and walking along a dark corridor follows. At first it seems she is flanked by two mirrors, but the frame is a multiple exposure. The effect is the same: Isabel is no longer one self with a single reflection, but rather a series of images, all wavering, without an explicit point of view.

Having depicted how Osmond has stupefied Isabel, Campion shows the audience both Osmond's wickedness and Isabel's helplessness; however, the filmic Isabel might also seem, from this scene, like the complaisant victim of Osmond's violence. James's Isabel senses the death of her respect for Osmond; Campion's Isabel is still clearly "touched" by Osmond, and therefore still vulnerable to him. It is not, though, Gilbert's physical violence that is fearful; rather, it is the argument he has on his side.

When a telegram from England informs Isabel that Ralph Touchett is dying, Osmond declares he will not forgive her if she leaves to visit Ralph, so delicate is his sense of decorum for married people. He explains, "I've an ideal of what my wife should do and should not do. . . . I assure you that *we, we,* Mrs. Osmond, is all I know. . . . I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of the thing!" For Isabel, Osmond's words have "a gravity," representing something "transcendent and absolute, like the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country. He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious—the observance of a magnificent form."[20] Though this is Osmond's perversion—commitment to surface, to form, with nothing beneath—Isabel nevertheless feels the sacredness of the forms. The idea of leaving Osmond, the intention she has stated, now seems a breaking of that sacred trust, however mangled, whose weight Isabel feels. Gilbert controls her by controlling the logic of convention, a logic Isabel cannot understand, let alone fight. At this, James's Isabel feels "as if a cold, dark mist had suddenly encompassed her." In frustration at this encompassing, the filmic Isabel bangs her head against a wall.

A number of reviewers see proof of Isabel's "female masochist tendencies" in this scene. But a more fitting perversion for Isabel may be "overvaluation," in which the appreciation of the subject for its sexual object

> spreads over into the psychological sphere: the subject becomes, as it were, intellectually infatuated (that is, [her] powers of judgment are weakened) by the mental achievements and perfections of the sexual object and [she] submits to the latter's judgments with credulity. Thus the credulity of love becomes an important, if not the most fundamental, source of authority.[21]

Isabel's perverse relation to Osmond is intellectual rather than physical; certainly it is so in James's novel. But finding a new perversion for Isabel only redoubles her situation, just as describing the film as a study in "female masochism" too tidily wraps up the problem as exclusively Isabel's, or any woman's. Furthermore, it ignores Isabel's justifiable evaluation of Osmond's perversity: "You like nothing I do or do not do. You pretend to think I lie. I can't tell you how unjust you seem to me. It's your own opposition that's calculated. . . . It's malignant."[22]

Melodramatic Perversions

Perverse scenarios, Louise Kaplan observes, are about the ordinary pitched at the level of the extraordinary; they are not outside the range of human experience.[23] There is no argument to make against the argument of convention, which itself rests on nothing more than gender codes. The lack of a rhetorical recourse in turn

Isabel reflected

suggests there is no alternative but to live with this quotidian shibboleth. That is why watching Campion's anti-melodramatic film is so frustrating: even if the villain is punished and the heroine escapes his rigid system, she cannot do anything to the villain, or about him. The social order insists on innocence and submission as ways of achieving normal adult femininity; thus "Females learn very early to disguise their intellectual powers as 'feminine intuition' and to compromise their active sexual desires into flirtatiousness and a teasing sexual unavailability."[24] Unable to masquerade in this manner, Isabel falls victim, as Judith Butler might put it, to "the law that guarantees failure."[25]

There is no such tidy phenomenon as "female masochism" per se, but there are such things as ingrained gender roles, especially as they are refracted in the medium of film. By depicting James's repressed scenes of the violence and sexual curiosity that hang between Isabel and Gilbert, Campion shows precisely the aporia that exists in their relationship (and, by extension, the gap in all like relationships). But Campion also critiques James, questioning how it could be that Osmond "was not violent." The very nature of his power over Isabel—his power to quash her ability to resist—is, by definition, violent. Furthermore, how does James finally define what "independence" means for a woman? According to Peter Brooks, "The reasons for outward and inward melodrama in James are the same: his desire to make ethical conflict, imperative, and choice the substance of the novel, to make it the nexus of 'character' and the motivation of plot."[26] Campion's probable response to such a view seems obvious: What choice? Critics have long pointed out that James's inability to find a new path for Isabel shows how confounded he, too, was by her situation.

Since Campion's Isabel suffers more from victimization than from a headstrong egoism, moral reproof must shift to those who stuck Isabel in her situation—to Ralph Touchett and Madame Merle, of course; but ultimately, accountability lies in a system beyond either's ken and beyond the film's capacity to represent. Unlike *The Piano*'s heroine, who did not speak, or Kay and Sweetie in *Sweetie,* who enact repression and unchecked libido respectively, the states of mind Campion attempts to convey through Isabel are trickier to grasp, precisely because they are so naturalized in the culture we inherit from the nineteenth century as not to seem perverse at all. Openly baring the sexual drive of melodrama expunges its conventional meaning and enjoyment, but the issue at stake, as James put it, is communicability—in this case communicability to the film audience of an intractable problem in which it is implicated.

Pondering why certain "pictures of life" should have about them an air of "romance" and others an air of "reality," James suggests that "these values represent different sorts and degrees of the communicable thrill." The "real," to his perception, represented "the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, in one way or another"; whereas the "romantic" stood for things that "with all the faculties in the world . . . we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire."[27] Peter Brooks suggests that the "romantic," as "the realm of knowledge reached through desire," is precisely the register or mode of James's melodramas of consciousness. The "romantic" in this sense also recalls Brooks's description of melodrama as "a form that facilitates the 'circuit' of desire, permits its break through repression, brings its satisfaction in full expression."[28]

I contend that Campion, who sees James as a realist, also perceives *The Portrait of a Lady* as realistic. The difficulty for the filmmaker lies in communicating the reality of Isabel's psychological, social, and intellectual situation—a situation that, for her and other young women, cannot *not* be known sooner or later—to a filmgoing audience simultaneously lured to other pleasures. As James put it,

> there is our general sense of the way things happen—it abides with us indefeasibly, as readers of fiction, from the moment we demand that our fiction shall be intelligible; and there is our particular sense of the way they don't happen, which is liable to wake up unless reflexion and criticism, in us, have been skilfully and successfully drugged.[29]

In film after film, Jane Campion works to jar us out of druggedness, to jolt us into a conscious appraisal of

what, exactly, our general sense of the way things happen *is,* and of whether that way is actually useful. And this anti-drugging crusade quite logically brings us to *Holy Smoke!,* Campion's follow-up to *Portrait*. Here is feminist fantasy indeed: a post-Isabelian heroine who not only knows she wants freedom, but has tasted it and is loath to give it up.

Holy Smoke!

Ruth Baron (Kate Winslet), a rather bratty Australian teenager, travels to India where she discovers a guru named Baba and undergoes a religious experience. A friend rushes back to Australia to tell Ruth's parents that their daughter has joined a cult. Frightened and puzzled, they hire an American "exit counselor" to get her back.

P.J. Waters (Harvey Keitel), the deprogrammer, has developed an almost foolproof system; it consists of a three-day, three-step process during which he successively isolates the client, provokes her, removes all her props, and gains her trust; at the end of which, somehow, "reason bursts forth" and P.J. wins. The process of "exiting" Ruth seems a parodic twenty-first-century informercial version of Gilbert Osmond's slow killing of Isabel's spirit. Yet Isabel and Ruth are alike in their captivity, and in the reasons for their punishment. "All through history you can see how women have been controlled; and if they break free, how they're rounded up as witches, or as insane," says Campion.[30] In one scene, Ruth is literally corralled by her male relatives as they attempt to deliver her to P.J. However, whereas Isabel Archer was conned into believing she had met her intellectual guide in Gilbert Osmond, Ruth knows on sight that the black-clad, Binaca-abusing P.J. is a spiritual fraud. Ruth and P.J. are locked into a shack in the outback for the duration of the "program." There they engage, as one expects from Jane Campion, in gender and spiritual combat.

Ruth, trapped by P.J. and his three steps, is forced to see that her spiritual epiphany was naïve and ignorant. Wavering in her faith, but certain of her perception of P.J., Ruth turns the tables. Using her youth and sensuality, she induces P.J. to see himself through her eyes: a ridiculous middle-aged man who no longer impresses but continues to chase young women. Ruth dismantles his hypermasculine defenses so thoroughly that she is ultimately able to convince him to trade his gunslinger duds for a flaming red dress and some lipstick.

Several critics considered the film's "destruction of a man" motif as just another Campion escapade, and bemoaned Keitel's "softness"—would this have happened to a De Niro or a Pacino? Or at least a male protagonist more equal to the challenge posed by Ruth? But such critics miss the point. Campion's target is no more a man than the heroine is a (singular) woman. Campion repeatedly replays the battle of the sexes precisely to loosen the audience's white-knuckled grasp on individual characters, and to lead it to consider the social systems in place in and beyond the theater. Diana Simmonds notes that Campion's films, "in their very different ways, are all about the effects on the human psyche of society's cruelty and meanness, intentional or otherwise."[31] Certainly, male and female relationships create ripe sites for cruelty, as does the other key trope of *Holy Smoke!*: the debate between reason and intuition, detachment and compassion. As Campion explains, "Men and women have to get on with the journey—to the heart—sometime. I think everyone wants to come outside the cave and make that journey. They're just terribly afraid, afraid they're going to go mad and die."[32]

In *Holy Smoke!,* P.J. is the more fearful; Ruth perceives this with enviable clarity, and acts accordingly. She wins the battle but ultimately, graciously, calls it a draw. Isabel Archer, by contrast, can only lose. She leaves Rome and Osmond to attend to the dying Ralph Touchett, who has in turn asked Caspar Goodwood to "do what he can for her—whatever she will let him do." Campion's final image has Isabel running away, again, from Goodwood. Afraid to return to Rome and the abuse that awaits her there, she is also afraid to accept Goodwood's offer of help. To take it means admitting her marriage is a failure, that she has been a fool, and that she is willing to be perceived an adulteress. Isabel reaches the door of the Touchett's house, then turns, facing the garden, undecided.

Something Showily Big

Critics who disliked *Portrait of a Lady* suggest that Campion had wasted her talents on a money-laden, middlebrow project—a cheap bid at a larger audience. But that opinion springs from a romantic notion of the artist that has never held much validity for women filmmakers. The (overvalued) ideal of the artist's self-expression can only be so powerful for women when feminist film practice, whether avant-garde or simply experimental, must take place "in a society where the discourse of women is suppressed, and can only return

in the form of symptoms in the gaps and fissures of dominant ideology."[33] Typical auteur theory can also only say so much about Campion's practice as a director, for her films so thoroughly deconstruct the theoretical and ideological moves by which (with our existing tools) we might decipher what they "mean." The definition of auteur demands in the first place that one's style, to be recognized as distinctive, become known beyond a small coterie; but to be effective, an artist must touch the sensibilities of wider audiences. It might be wise to recall that Henry James ached to do precisely that.

Peter Brooks reminds us that James was attracted to the theater "because the theatre promised a sociable, institutional glory, and because it offered the possibility of popular and financial success." James was, in fact, attracted to the idea of doing something popular even into the 1890s, when his fiction had evolved past much of the lurid melodrama of earlier pieces; he longed to "do something popular, something that would give overt expression to the most melodramatic elements in his imagination."[34] In his preface to *The Tragic Muse,* a late novel about actors and the theater, James wished wistfully that art could be "with truth, with taste, with discretion involved, apparently and showily 'big.'" Unfortunately, contemporary definitions of "art" allowed nothing so unrestrained.[35]

James wrote his brother William in 1880 that *The Portrait of a Lady* would be "more spacious . . . more human . . . more sociable" than his other works, and that in it he would reject the limitations he had imposed upon himself in the past.[36] I think Campion would see herself as having done the latter in her version: rejecting limitations in hopes that her audience will learn to do the same. As she has explained: "We have to seduce people into the joy of thinking, feeling more deeply."[37] The critical position that views adaptations, mainstream tastes, and Hollywood spectacle as anathema to art is not only pointlessly snobbish, but almost inevitably anti-feminist and anti-affective to boot. It is therefore bound to be unsympathetic to James—a closet melodramatist, to Campion—an unrepentant feminist, and certainly to any cinematic conjugation of the two.

Rebecca M. Gordon is a doctoral candidate in English and Film Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Notes

1. Among others, Todd McCarthy, "Campion's elegant, chilly 'Portrait'," *Variety,* September 9-15, 1996, 114. Directly opposite McCarthy's dismissive review sits a glowing review of Merchant-Ivory's *Surviving Picasso,* starring Anthony Hopkins as the "playful, charismatic" artist; an ironic example of male-centered, modernist, gleefully phallocentric pictures getting the thumbs-up while a feminist film based on the novel of a not-so-phallocentric author is labelled, literally, "frigid."
2. Sue Harper, "Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film,* ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 167-94.
3. Richard Blackmuir, "Introduction," *The Art of the Novel,* by Henry James (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1962), xiii.
4. See bookmark and notecard from the press kit.
5. Tony Tanner, *Henry James, Vol. 1: 1843-1881,* Writers and Their Work Series (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1979), 8-10.
6. Alan Shelston, ed., "Introduction," *Casebook, "Washington Square" and "The Portrait of a Lady"* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 12.
7. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 19.
8. *Home Is Where the Heart Is,* 30.
9. Ibid., 9.
10. Anthony Mazzella, "The New Isabel," in *The Portrait of a Lady: Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1975), 597-621. All references to *The Portrait of a Lady* are from this edition unless otherwise stated.
11. *The Portrait of a Lady,* 144-45.
12. The viewer's situation is more complicated. We enjoy watching Isabel enjoy herself—but suddenly seeing *three* men with her is startling, and vaguely embarrassing. When the men shimmer into nothingness, we are saved further discomfort because Isabel's fantasy is hers again, not ours. Though far tamer, the scene is reminiscent of the sequence from *The Piano* when Stewart watches Ada and Baines through the slats of Baines's cabin. While Ada and Baines make love, the camera cuts to Stewart. A dog licks Stewart's hand; the licking sound off screen instigates a quick tilt down to the dog, then a tilt back up to Stewart. Instead of being startled, like the audience who giggle nervously at the slurping, Stewart lifts his hand from the dog's mouth, looks at his wet fingers, then turns back to peeping between the slats, absent-mindedly wiping his hand on the wall. At this point the audience stops giggling, having realized, uncomfortably, that the film has deliberately jolted them from their peeping pleasure, but not Stewart from his.
13. *The Portrait of a Lady,* 145.
14. There is no room here for a more thorough discussion of Madame Merle; suffice it to say that Campion and Jones interpret her not as a villainness but as a melodramatic heroine in her own right. Isabel's attraction to Merle is depicted as that of one free-thinker to a fellow. Campion makes great use of James's evaluation of Merle, articulated through Isabel's consciousness, as a woman "who knew how to think—a rare accomplishment in a woman." Hence, as Campion interprets the novel, the two women *must* be thrust together because they are women who think, and whose lives bear traces of the violence such women experience.
15. According to the press kit, Campion views the novel as "a fairy tale with Osmond representing the underworld into

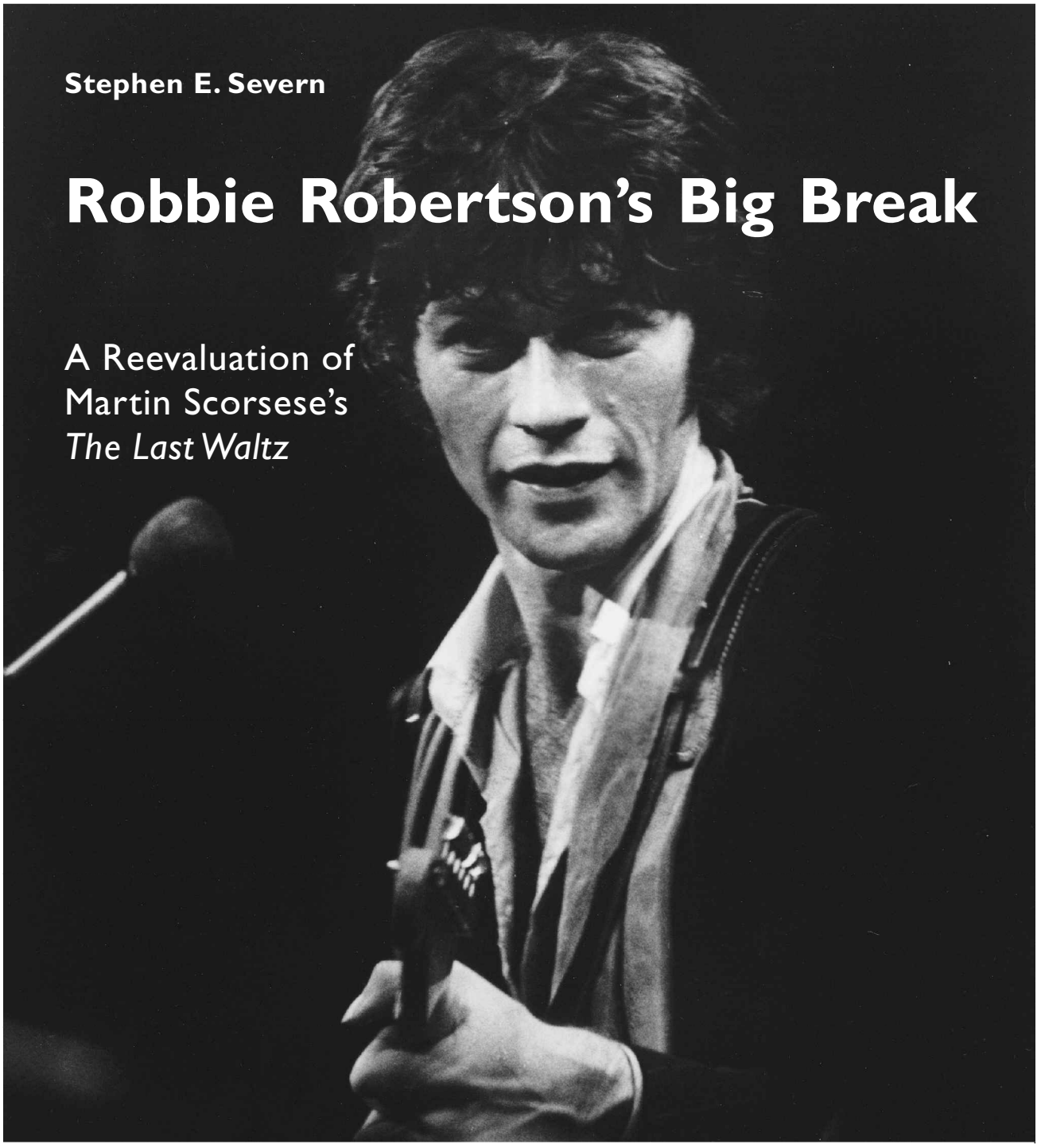
which Madame Merle leads Isabel," who escapes at the end.

16. If the viewer recognizes the soundtrack, Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," playing throughout the Osmonds' Thursday at-home, it becomes clear that though Gilbert Osmond conducts the proceedings, it is Madame Merle, who played Schubert at the Touchetts' home where she and Isabel met, who has orchestrated everything.
17. *The Portrait of a Lady,* 404.
18. Ibid., 356-60 passim.
19. Ibid., 402.
20. Ibid., 447, 446.
21. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 16. Freud believed this phenomenon could be best studied in men, for their erotic life was more accessible to research. The significance of sexual overvaluation for women was "still veiled in impenetrable obscurity . . . partly owing to the stunting effect of our civilized conditions and partly owing to their conventional secretiveness and insincerity." Never perceiving, of course, that the latter might have its cause in the former.
22. Laura Jones, *The Portrait of a Lady: Screenplay Based on the Novel by Henry James* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 111.
23. Louise Kaplan, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 20.
24. Ibid., 15.
25. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 57.
26. *The Melodramatic Imagination,* 159.
27. *The Art of the Novel,* 32.
28. *The Melodramatic Imagination,* 154.
29. *The Art of the Novel,* 34.
30. Diana Simmonds, "Witches of Freedom," interview and review of *Holy Smoke!* http://www.urbancinefile.com.au/home/article_view.asp?Article_ID=3108&Section=Interviews, accessed 17 May 2001.
31. Ibid.
32. Kathleen Murphy, "Jane Campion's Passage to India," *Film Comment* 36:1 (Jan./Feb. 2000), 32.
33. Pam Cook, "The Point of Self-Expression in Avant-Garde Film," in John Caughie, ed., *Theories of Authorship* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 280-81.
34. *The Melodramatic Imagination,* 162.
35. In the preface to the screenplay, Laura Jones writes, "I hope that we have given [James] his theatrical desires: to be loved and understood as a dramatist, in performance" (x). Specifically, Jones refers to *Guy Domville,* a play James wrote in the years following *Portrait,* when he wished most fervently to achieve popular success as a playwright. The play's failure affected James deeply for years. Jones's sentiment also suggests the aims Jane Campion and Jones had for their translation of *Portrait* to film, and underscores—perhaps to legitimate—the affinity they felt to James.
36. Quoted in Shelston, 9.
37. "Witches of Freedom."

Stephen E. Severn

Robbie Robertson's Big Break

A Reevaluation of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz*



The Last Waltz represents a dramatic reimagining of the possibilities inherent in the "rockumentary" genre. Ostensibly, the film chronicles the final concert given by The Band in San Francisco on Thanksgiving Day, 1976, but ultimately it stands as much more than a simple documentary. It may be the best film ever made about the music scene, but rather than celebrating the now fabled rock group, what *The Last Waltz* really does is foretell its death. Yet as a film that moves beyond the music to engage with ideas about image-making (both that of the lead singer, Robbie Robertson, and, more indirectly, that of the filmmaker himself), it has resonance beyond its own history. Recent screenings of the re-released and digitally remastered print

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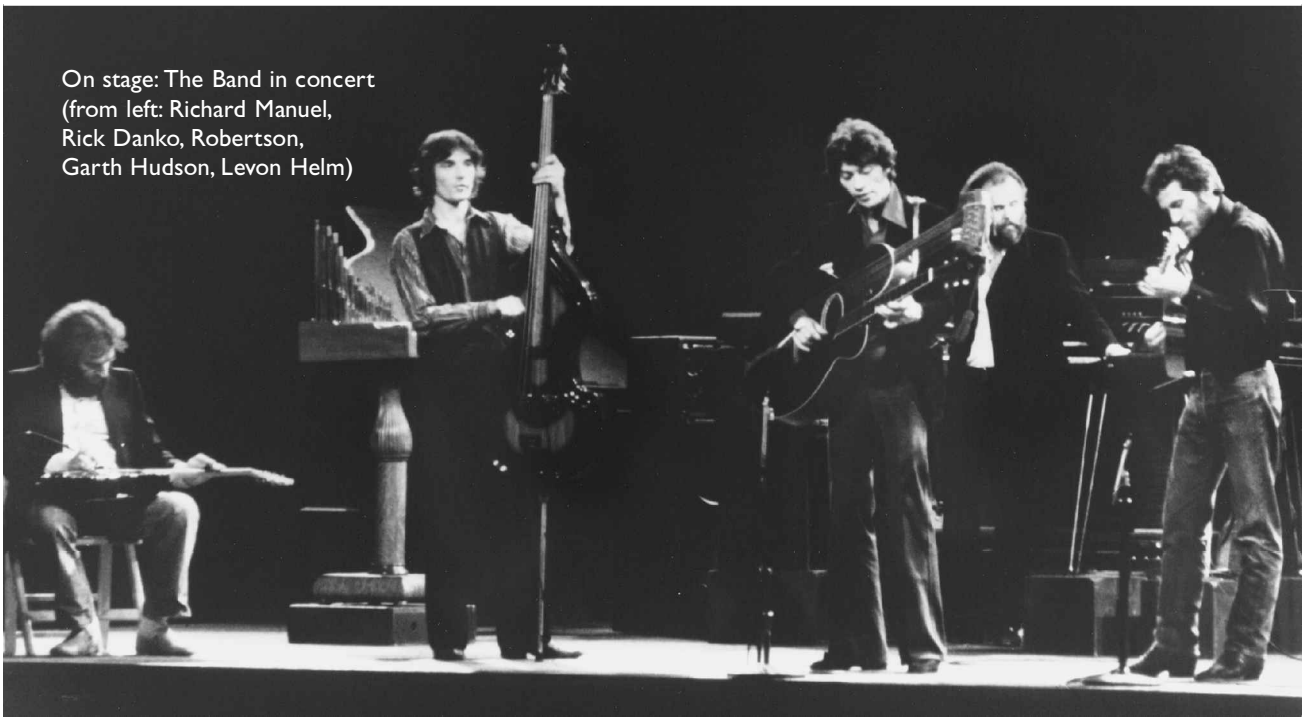

On stage: The Band in concert (from left: Richard Manuel, Rick Danko, Robertson, Garth Hudson, Levon Helm)

have engaged unexpectedly large and varied audiences. United Artists has also released the remastered film on DVD, complete with extra footage, audio commentary from Martin Scorsese and Robertson, a behind-the-scenes featurette, and liner notes by Robertson.

Earlier concert films such as *Gimme Shelter* and *Woodstock* featured relatively low-quality footage and unimaginative camerawork. Their rudimentary approaches implicitly question the importance of the very events that the films attempt to capture, as though they were just rock concerts and did not deserve the expense and care given to more serious subjects. But from the outset, Scorsese and The Band committed to making *The Last Waltz* the first concert film shot in 35mm. It is crammed with astonishing visual depth and unexpected images—the stage presences in intimate and overwhelming close-ups set against a dark and brooding background. The influence of the film's clarity can be clearly traced in such later works as the Talking Heads' *Stop Making Sense* (1984) and U2's *Rattle and Hum* (1987). Moreover, Scorsese's camerawork further confounds the expectations of the genre by essentially eliminating the audience from the film, thus focusing all the attention on the musicians themselves.

Beyond its obvious importance as a concert film, *The Last Waltz* deserves renewed critical attention simply as a film because no thorough explication of its basic thematic construction has yet appeared. It has long been relegated to the margins of Scorsese scholarship and generally merits only a passing mention, alongside his 1978 documentary *American Boy,* as a minor diversion for the director that helped to fill the gap between *New York, New York* (1977) and *Raging Bull* (1980). This is unfair, because *The Last Waltz* marks a crucial turning point for Scorsese and is the first installment in a tetralogy of films that dominate his mid-period of work. It stands as his first exploration of the manner by which image may be manipulated as a means for eliminating risk, a thematic obsession which continues in *The King of Comedy* (1982), *The Color of Money* (1986), and *Casino* (1995).

In addition to critical neglect, *The Last Waltz* has also been the victim of general misinterpretation. It is often viewed in idyllic terms as an embodiment of nostalgia for the past, when in reality its focus is the future. Seeing it as a film built around a musical event reveals a calculated, committed, and personal narrative. The movie's real subject is not The Band as a whole, but Robbie Robertson. The film represents a highly crafted and complex exercise in image-making. There is ample filmic evidence to suggest that Robertson influenced Scorsese's construction of the film in order to establish himself as a star within the Hollywood community and launch his post-Band career. Robertson was the only member of the group to work with Scorsese during the 18-month postproduction period, and in drummer Levon Helm's estimation the duo "edited the movie to please themselves."[1] To his credit, Michael

Bliss does pick up on the Robertson's overwhelming presence in the film and argues that "given the amount of footage devoted to Robertson, the film might just well have been titled *Robbie Robertson Speaks*."[2] The guitarist's dominance goes far beyond the amount of camera time allotted to him, however, because virtually every visual and thematic aspect of *The Last Waltz* is designed to showcase his talents at the expense of the other members of the group. Because of this, the movie has no interest in simple nostalgia, despite the presence of numerous luminaries from the Woodstock era who approach their performances with an air of hushed reverence, as though they were taking part in the last hurrah for a rapidly evaporating age.

Robertson took a tremendous risk when, in 1976, he decided to disband the group because of its commercial failures and late keyboardist Richard Manuel's burgeoning drug and alcohol problems. He himself needed to establish an identifiable public persona: his talents as songwriter, guitarist, and producer were widely acknowledged, but the group had publicly avoided the usual egotistical posings of rock stars. The Band enjoyed a reputation as a cohesive whole, which served to downplay Robertson's individual identity. But in reality, *The Last Waltz* represents an exercise in self-mythologizing—through the interviews with their distinctive camerawork and settings and the on-stage footage of the actual concert—for Robertson, and the deconstruction/destruction of the group as a whole.

The primacy of Robertson and his image is clearly demonstrated in the opening scene of *The Last Waltz*. It stands as an intricate and carefully constructed moment. At first the viewer sees nothing but a blank screen and hears only the voices of Rick Danko (the group's bass guitarist), Scorsese, and another member of the film crew as they run through a first take. Danko manages to only utter one word—"cutthroat"—before the filmmaker interrupts him with a question to the crew about the audio recording. After this false start, the visual image appears as a close-up of a rack of balls on a billiard table. The camera then pulls back to show Danko preparing to break. But, before he does so, there's a brief conversation with Scorsese (off-camera):

> SCORSESE: OK, Rick, what's the game?
>
> DANKO: Cutthroat.
>
> SCORSESE : What's the object of it?
>
> DANKO: The object is to keep your balls on the table and knock everybody else's off.

If *The Last Waltz* sought to merely chronicle a concert, then this would be a most peculiar way to begin. Robert Kolker has pointed to the documentary quality of Scorsese's feature films, but here the reverse occurs as the "false start" serves to accentuate the feature quality of the documentary.[3] Indeed, in planning for the concert shooting, Scorsese developed a 200-page working script that sought to coordinate the event at all levels. Although many of these directions were abandoned during the actual filming because of logistical realities, the script's mere existence underscores the fact that *The Last Waltz* does not simply capture an event, it constructs one, and "cutthroat" provides its central metaphor.

That metaphor, however, is extremely complex, and the scene demands careful consideration because within the subtle nuances of cutthroat's structure lies the unifying thematic principle of *The Last Waltz*. Certainly, the word itself carries violent, bloody connotations, and Danko's analysis invokes a vision of the classic Western gunfight, where the last cowboy left standing walks away the winner. But as Scorsese's initial question indicates, cutthroat is also obviously a game. It is not, however, a game of chance, but one of skill, audacity, and assurance. More than any other form of billiards, cutthroat values calculation and skill over luck. Success at the game does demand that risks be taken where appropriate, but by demonstrating careful control of the cue ball and foresightedness in planning for future shots, a skilled player can lessen the danger. Scorsese's camera clearly shows that Danko lacks these talents: he jabs the cue instead of stroking it, his shots are wild and random, and his face betrays the fact that he is surprised by the game's progression. The pool table becomes a site for chaos.

Contrast this with the following scene, as Scorsese cuts to Robertson calmly walking out on stage, alone, to address the frenzied audience before the concert's final encore. The shot constitutes one of the very few times in *The Last Waltz* where Scorsese chooses to highlight the crowd, and the assurance in Robertson's face as he greets the fans counterbalances the uncertainty just seen in Danko's. Robertson's ultimatum, delivered as he stands bathed in the spotlight at center stage, "We're going to do one more song, and then that's it," emphasizes his control. More importantly, the shot establishes Robertson's identity as separate from the other members of the group. Although the movie begins with a shot of Danko alone, the other band members are clearly seen in that opening sequence as the camera follows him around the table. But they do not come onstage until after Robertson has announced their intention to perform a final number. These opening scenes thus establish *The Last Waltz* as

a game of cutthroat where image, specifically Robertson's image, is at stake. He is willing to take the risk of playing only "one more song" as part of The Band because the film provides him with the opportunity to develop his own persona.

Although Scorsese handled the planning for the filming of the concert, the idea to do interviews came from Robertson. They were conducted in 1977, almost a year after the event. The guitarist also suggested that Scorsese do the interviews, but in retrospect the director feels that this was "not a good idea"—finding the members of the band to be "very quiet and very formidable."[4] But in fact the interview segments constitute the most fascinating part of the movie: this is where the construction of Robertson's image and the deconstruction of The Band's really occur. Scorsese talks with the members of the group, both singularly and together, at different locations at Shangri-La, their studio/headquarters in Malibu. In keeping with his own reservations, he truly is a terrible interviewer—nervous, tentative, and clearly in awe of Robertson. Scorsese's deficiencies, however, only serve to accentuate Robertson's skills as a rhetorician: although he frequently bandies about pseudo-intellectual clichés, he is always articulate and well-spoken.

Conversely, Scorsese's inexperience as an interviewer hurts the other band members, whose answers betray their relatively limited vision or their reluctance to speak. Manuel and Danko seem like precocious children who offer up amusing anecdotes about stealing bologna, and suggest that women are the real reason The Band stayed on the road for 16 years—"not that I don't like the music." Compared with Robertson's artistic posturings and grand designs, Manuel's admission that "I just wanna break even" seems downright refreshing, but it's also sophomoric. Similarly, Scorsese admits that Helm proved a "formidable" subject who was not interested in talking.[5] Helm himself is less reserved in his judgment of the situation: "I already had a bad attitude when I realized that the cameras had completely ignored the spirit of the event. . . . I said, 'This shit don't mean nothing to me.' Nothing. I was just coarse and rude, *country* rude, because I was so damn angry."[6]

Organist Garth Hudson, however, stands as the exception, speaking with a quiet intensity and perspicacity about The Band's attraction to the rustic lifestyle of Woodstock and the role of street musicians as a healing force. Unfortunately, he only speaks twice, and in both cases, he is surrounded by the other four band members. Scorsese never approaches him in a more personal and revealing setting, and it must be noted that of *The Last Waltz* footage, Scorsese cuts short only the performance of "Genetic Method/Chest Fever," a pairing of songs which had long served as Hudson's concert showcase. Helm laments that *The Last Waltz* includes nothing to show "how Garth Hudson led the band and inspired us all."[7] Perhaps Robertson felt threatened that the keyboardist's undeniable talent and quiet leadership would overshadow his own contribution to the group, and used his influence with Scorsese to marginalize Hudson's presence in the film.

The elevation of Robertson during the interview segments occurs in other ways as well. In multiple-person interviews, he always provides the astute analysis, while the other members make banal comments or act as mere background. A poignant, early scene with Helm demonstrates this strategy. The two are seated on the pool table from the opening scene, and Scorsese reminds us of the game of cutthroat that is taking place. With a velvet painting of New York City behind them, Helm discusses the city as a place where you "get your ass kicked," and recalls the group's early experiences there. Robertson adds to these memories, but then shifts the conversation to focus on their association with the songwriters of Tin Pan Alley. He describes how the artists they met there, such as Neil Diamond and Carole King, worked to expand the importance of songwriting. During the last part of this analysis, Scorsese moves to a close-up of Robertson and then cuts to footage from the concert of Neil Diamond playing "Dry Your Eyes." Robertson simultaneously becomes the focal point, the pronouncer of historical judgment, and the point of transition for the film.

Similarly, in his one-on-one segments with Scorsese, Robertson is always framed by objects of power. For the first discussion, the camera captures both Scorsese and Robertson together, emphasizing the bond between them. A Canadian flag behind Robertson conspicuously calls attention to his heritage. The remaining interviews with Robertson take place in the studio console room, where Scorsese moves out of frame and a respectful distance is established as Robertson assumes the role of visionary and auteur, at home in the work space where he pursues his craft.

Quite different strategies are applied for the other members. While discussing how The Band got its name, Manuel curls up on a couch in the fetal position, looking, in Helm's, words like "Che Guevara after the Bolivians got through with him."[8] Conversely, Helm is never interviewed alone; Robertson is always present, although at times he is off-camera and only his voice is heard. During two conversations that take place in the backyard at a picnic table, Scorsese care-

fully frames Helm with the pool table in soft focus in the background. The central metaphor of cutthroat remains ever present.

In keeping with the chaos that surrounds him in the opening scene, Danko is more volatile and elects to take Scorsese on a tour of the studio. His story of the building's former life as a bordello—complete with references to "decadent" wallpaper—is amusing, but lacks the gravity of the discussions that the director engages in with Robertson. In the end, Danko becomes infantilized just like Manuel when the bassist's tour winds up in the console room. Scorsese poignantly asks him what he has been up to since *The Last Waltz*. After fumbling for a second, Danko has a recording engineer play a tape of one of his recent compositions. Despite Scorsese's feigned interest, Danko's material clearly cannot match Robertson's songs, and after realizing how hopelessly inadequate his answer—"trying to stay busy"—seems, he lapses into a look of obvious frustration and appears to weep. Scorsese holds the camera on Danko in medium close-up for an agonizing 25 seconds, and at that moment the real-life implications of *The Last Waltz* seem to become clear to him: like a loser in the game of cutthroat, he sees clearly that all his balls have been knocked off the table.

A rare view of the concert audience . . .

Despite Danko's obvious disappointment over The Band's demise, *The Last Waltz* in no way seeks to dwell upon the past. Indeed, part of Helm's frustration with the film stems from his expectation that the project would amount to a celebration of times gone by: "The idea was for us to sit around the campfire and shoot the shit about the good old days, maybe pick up some instruments, let the good times roll."[9] At times, some of this actually does take place, especially when Danko, Robertson, and Manuel run through an impromptu version of the folk song "Old Time Religion." But even here, Robertson takes center stage because he is the one who suggests that the trio do the song as a treat "for the folks." After they have finished their decidedly ragged performance, he comments wryly, "It's not like it used to be," which, of course, is the whole point of the movie. The sense of a lost past becomes a method for shaping expectations of the future after the death of The Band. The past is present in the movie only because it acts as an essential tool for the accomplishment of Robertson's agenda. His reminiscences and analyses serve to construct a vision of the past that casts him in the role of rock-and-roll auteur.

As a means of further manipulating the vision of past in order to develop his own mythology, Robertson specifically ties himself to Elvis Presley, "The King of Rock and Roll," throughout the film. As one of the few rock stars who managed to cross from music over to movies and back again, Presley personified the transition that Robertson hoped to make via *The Last Waltz*. Elvis died between the filming of the Thanksgiving Day concert and Scorsese's subsequent interviews, leaving a symbolic gap in the rock-and-roll world which Robertson thought he could fill. To emphasize this, he repeatedly injects the figure of "The King" into the interview segments. For instance, when speaking of how "the road" claimed a lot of the "greats," he points to Elvis, a connection which represents a calculated exercise in revisionist history, since it was the static decadence of Graceland and not a dynamic touring lifestyle that claimed the King's life. Earlier in the film, as Scorsese is interviewing Helm outside at a picnic table, Robertson's voice abruptly chimes in from off-camera with the word "Elvis" in answer to a question about who constituted the premier musical figure from the Delta region. As usual, Helm is cut off and overwhelmed by Robertson's agenda. Lastly, the Elvis standard, "Mystery Train," is the only cover song performed by a guest artist during the film, and not surprisingly, Robertson's guitar playing behind Paul

Butterfield stands as some of his most lively of the entire concert. Although it has eluded critical attention, this strategy of association did not go unnoticed by Helm. He derides *The Last Waltz* as "mostly Robertson, showing off and acting like he was the king."[10]

For the guitarist, the exercise in image-making succeeded brilliantly: in the wake of the film's release his reputation in Hollywood was established—at least for a while. The romance would not last, of course, and Robertson's transition to a leading role in the movie business never occurred. He produced and acted in the box-office flop *Carny* (1980), but beyond that his involvement in film has been limited to various soundtrack projects, significantly including Scorsese's *The King of Comedy, The Color of Money,* and *Casino*.

This said, a word of caution is still required. Given what's at stake in the film for Robertson and his dominance over the entire work, it would be tempting to read *The Last Waltz* as *his* film and see Scorsese simply as a tool exploited by the guitarist. This position, however, would be both inaccurate and unfair. Although Scorsese's need for it is not as immediately evident as Robertson's, when *Waltz* is considered in relation to his other work it becomes clear that he gets just as much, if not more, out of the project.

For in this film Scorsese begins to explore the thematic agenda that comes to dominate three of his next major films, *The King of Comedy, The Color of Money,* and *Casino,* and he uses Robertson as a living template for the basic character type that dominates those works. All of them focus upon individuals or groups operating outside the mainstream of American life—a delusional stand-up comic, an aging pool hustler, and a collection of gamblers and Mafia operators—who are, literally and figuratively, looking for their big break. To achieve that goal, they must confront the manipulation of image as a means for eliminating risk. Those who successfully manipulate image, either consciously or unconsciously, become winners, and those who do not become the exploited, the losers.

In *Casino,* casino manager Ace Rothstein (Robert De Niro) sums up this image/risk dialectic when he describes an encounter with K. K. Ichikawa, a Japanese businessman who initially wins two million dollars from the Tangiers Hotel. Unable to tolerate such a loss, Rothstein has Ichikawa's departing flight sabotaged and brings him back for a second round of gambling. Eventually, the gambler's luck runs out and the casino wins back its two million plus another million more. For Rothstein, the incident points to the cardinal rule of the house: "Keep them playing and keep them coming back. The longer they play, the more they lose. In the end, we get it all." In the language of *The Last Waltz,* this equates to keeping "all your balls on the table." Seemingly simple, the lesson here actually points to a fundamental paradox. Because the house ultimately will win, risk is in fact not risk at all, but rather a foregone conclusion, and the only truly smart move that a player can make is not to play. To "keep them coming back" demands that an image of fairness—or, more correctly, of the possibility of winning—be maintained.

"Fast" Eddie Felson (Paul Newman) spends the first half of *The Color of Money* trying to teach Vince (Tom Cruise) a similar lesson by exposing him to the language of 9-ball and the aspects of the game that occur away from the pool table. For hustlers, the color of money and the color of the pool table are one and the same, and the game goes far beyond the actual pocketing of balls. During their first meeting over dinner, Eddie states plainly that "pool excellence is not about excellent pool. It's about becoming something . . . a student of human moves." Thus the hustler points to the obvious fact that control of the game rest solely upon control of image. Aside from his natural shot-making skill, Vince's true gift lies in his being an "incredible flake." But, as Eddie notes, the real question is can he "flake on and flake off?" This last observation relates to the other central fact that Vince learns from Eddie: "Sometimes, if you lose, you win." Although seemingly paradoxical, the statement merely reinforces the fact that the game on the table stands apart from the true game, which seeks only one thing—money.

The King of Comedy approaches the connection between risk and image from a somewhat different perspective. Unlike the main characters in the other films, the unstoppable Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) is not seeking redefinition or rebirth, but rather finds himself with the more challenging problem of trying to establish an initial identity. "Fast" Eddie Felson and Ace Rothstein are journeymen who have earned reputations. One can argue about the quality of those reputations, but at least when Felson walks into a pool hall in Chicago he is recognized. For his part, Rothstein claims "I was so good, when I bet could change the odds for every bookmaker in the country." Pupkin, on the other hand, is a nobody who desperately wants to break into the talk-show scene. During the fantasy lunch sequence that the comic imagines, his idol, TV host Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis), laments that those programs are all about the "same guests, same questions." The format prizes regularity above all else, and

therefore Pupkin, as an unknown figure, represents the greatest possible gamble. On the surface then, Pupkin's emergence at the end of the film as the newly crowned "King of Comedy" would seem to fly in the face of Ace Rothstein's assertion that "the players don't stand a chance" and to violate the fundamental connection between image and risk. But this is not the case. The comic succeeds because he operates within a completely different paradigm of social interaction.

In Pupkin, we see a character who conducts himself without any sense of embarrassment and who sidesteps or plows through the obstacles that would stop all normal stand-up comics in their quest for fame. Fueled by his desire for fame and caught up in delusions of a relationship with Langford, Pupkin refuses to take no for an answer. To get his big break, he finally resorts to kidnapping the host and ransoming him for a chance to perform a monologue. The move goes beyond risky and lands firmly in the realm of the inconceivable. Indeed, the FBI agents who arrest Pupkin remain perplexed by his action even after seeing the taping. Those systems that manipulate image within the talk-show industry to limit its risks cannot touch Pupkin, because his own image is not a concern to him. He merely fails to recognize any and all barriers put in his way.

Thus *Casino, The Color of Money,* and *The King of Comedy* all revolve around the complicated relationship between image and risk. But Scorsese had already begun to examine this issue through the persona of Robertson in *The Last Waltz*. And the difficulty in applying the term "documentary" to *The Last Waltz* derives from its decidedly non-objective presentation of the demise of The Band. The focus of this film is Robbie Robertson; Scorsese built it around him and built it for him. After screening the movie for the first time, Ronnie Hawkins, the Canadian singer for whom The Band played back-up in the early 1960s, joked sarcastically, "The goddamn movie'd be awright *if it only had a few more shots of Robbie*"[11] [emphasis original].

Nearly 25 years later, Hawkins' ironic suggestion has actually come to pass with the recently re-released DVD of *The Last Waltz*. Featuring a wealth of extra material, the project is dominated by Robertson and continues the process of image-making begun in the original work. The special-edition disk contains five pages of liner notes penned solely by the guitarist; running audio commentary by him and Scorsese; and a 20-minute featurette entitled "Revisiting *The Last Waltz*" that amounts to little more than a pair of interviews with the two, men edited in such a way that they are essentially responding to each other's self-congratulatory comments.

Unlike *The Last Waltz,* however, the extra material completely dispenses with the pretense that its focus is The Band as a whole and is instead overtly devoted to the guitarist. For instance, the icon to select the audio commentary is labeled "The Filmmaker and the Musician"—implying, of course, that the original group was little more than a single musician (Robertson) and four others who merely played instruments. And in the featurette, Scorsese, when speaking about the conception, planning, and execution of the original film, always uses the pronoun "he"—meaning Robertson—as opposed to "they."

Thus the subtext of *The Last Waltz* has now become text. A quarter century after its release, its inventive camerawork, distinctive structure, and unparalleled music remain the standard against which all concert films must be judged. But now, it is impossible to see this as a work "about" The Band. Without question, its subject is Robbie Robertson, and it clearly seeks to elevate him above the other members of the group. In doing so, the film begins a thematic obsession with the connection between risk and image that continues through three of Martin Scorsese's next major works. Watch *The Last Waltz* and revel in the fiery musicianship and exquisite songs, but always keep in mind the vision of cutthroat, and watch carefully as Scorsese helps Robertson make his big break.

Stephen E. Severn teaches English at the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently completing his dissertation.

Notes

1. Levon Helm and Stephen Davis, *This Wheel's on Fire: Levon Helm and the Story of The Band* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000), 275.
2. Michael Bliss, *Martin Scorsese and Michael Cimino* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 121.
3. Robert P. Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 165.
4. Martin Scorsese, *Scorsese on Scorsese,* ed. David Thompson and Ian Christie (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 74.
5. Ibid.
6. Helm, 271.
7. Ibid., 277.
8. Ibid., 276.
9. Ibid., 271.
10. Ibid., 277.
11. Qtd. in Helm, 372.

Reviews

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence

Director: Steven Spielberg. Producers: Bonnie Curtis; Kathleen Kennedy; Spielberg. Writers: Ian Watson; Spielberg, from a short story by Brian Aldiss. Cinematography: Janusz Kaminski. Music: John Williams. Warner Bros./Dreamworks.

On the night Stanley Kubrick died, Steven Spielberg showed friends gathered at his house the last scene from *Paths of Glory* as an example of Kubrick's underappreciated emotional side—"his heart." In that scene, a tavern owner brings a captured German farm girl onstage to the riotous hoots and whistles of a roomful of French soldiers. Nervously, she begins to sing them a lullaby, and gradually the men's catcalls die down, their raucous lechery giving way to nostalgia and homesickness, until, one by one, every man in the room begins to hum softly along to the tune they all remember, and even old veterans of the trenches are quietly weeping.

It is a moving scene, in a way that would become rare in Kubrick's later work. But Spielberg lifted it out of its context in the film. Those misty-eyed lugs are the same soldiers who, in the previous scene, stood dutifully in formation to watch another piece of impromptu theater as three of their comrades were ceremoniously tied to posts and shot. The scene also takes on additional resonance in the context of Kubrick's whole oeuvre. Compare it to the climax of his other great war movie, made at the other end of his career, *Full Metal Jacket*: war-weary young men are again unexpectedly faced with a beautiful girl, except this time she's a 15-year-old Viet Cong sniper who's shot three of their own. The men put a bullet in her head and march off singing another fondly recalled childhood song, the theme from the Mickey Mouse Club.

Spielberg loves tear-jerking scenes like that favorite in *Paths of Glory,* but he hasn't shown much of the subtlety, restraint, and layered irony that make Kubrick's work so rich and open to interpretation. Until now, he has made two distinct types of films: movies for children (*Jaws, Close Encounters,* the "Indiana Jones" trilogy, *E.T., Jurassic Park*) and movies for grownups (*The Color Purple, Schindler's List, Amistad, Saving Private Ryan, Minority Report*). His children's films are arguably among the greatest made since Walt Disney's; *E.T.* is, in its way, a perfect movie, on a par with *Pinocchio, King Kong,* or *The Wizard of Oz*. Of course, these are all manipulative and sentimental films. But children expect to be manipulated; they almost demand it. They're still struggling to manage their feelings, learning what adults call appropriate emotional responses—which things are funny, or scary, or sad.

Since Spielberg and Lucas revolutionized the business of filmmaking in the 1970s, however, *every* Hollywood film has been a children's film. Which is what makes Spielberg's films for adults more problematic. They've become increasingly "serious" in recent years, taking on much weightier subjects and made with the technical virtuosity of a master. But they remain marred by the same ingratiating, manipulative techniques that make his films for children so effective. Spielberg can't resist tugging at the heartstrings: he tries to find an "up" ending in everything from slavery to the Holocaust. *Amistad* tells the story of a handful of slaves who were freed, not the unremembered lives of the millions who remained in bondage. "The Holocaust is about six million people who get killed," Kubrick told Frederic Raphael. "*Schindler's List* was about six hundred who don't."[1]

Spielberg's weakness has always been his effort to supply some pat, verbal moral to the stunning visceral experiences he creates. He cannot resist trying to tell us what to think of his films, how to feel at the end—not to mention how we should interpret history. Ultimately, he seems to agree with most critics that if a director doesn't make us understand his films' intentions and feel exactly he way he wants us to feel, he's failed to do his job; he has betrayed the sacred shill/mark contract. And his audience, conditioned by decades of pandering and manipulation, has come to expect (even demand) that Skinnerian payoff: slip a ten through the box-office window, cry, and feel good. One viewer defended *A.I.* on an Internet message board by saying, "It made you feel exactly what they wanted you to feel, when they wanted you to feel it."[2]

But if *A.I.* had made us feel what Spielberg wanted us to, surely it would've been more commercially successful, instead of alienating audiences and disappearing at the box office. And, more importantly, it's hard to say exactly what, if anything, he "wanted" us to feel watching this film. Consider the scene in which Spielberg's suburban nuclear family—Monica, Henry, and their artificial son David—sit down to dinner together. David, intently watching Henry and Monica, pantomimes eating from an empty fork and drinking from an empty glass. Seeing a strand of pasta dangling from Monica's lip, he abruptly bursts out laughing, much too loudly, frightening his adopted family. At first, like

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In a world of robots: Haley Joel Osment as David

Henry and Monica, we're startled; then, relaxing, we tentatively start to laugh along with them in relief, but as David keeps laughing, his expression held too long, eyes almost panicked, mouth stretched open as if in a scream, the scene becomes grotesque, horrific. David switches off the laugh as suddenly as he started, and his parents stare at each other and at him in uneasy silence. It's the boldest moment in the first segment of the film; for once Steven Spielberg doesn't tell us how to feel. He's also shown us, with a directorial flourish, how easily our emotions are coached, first making us jump, then making us laugh, and finally leaving us, like Henry and Monica, not knowing what to think. Like David, he implies, we're just imitating the expressions in front of us, laughing and crying at nothing, going through the motions.

Spielberg leads the audience by the hand through some of *A.I.* with the assurance of a master manipulator, giving us some laughs, some tension, some cathartic tears—and then, unexpectedly, he leaves us alone in the very darkest part of the forest. He does finally give us a happy ending, but it's a false one, too happy to be believed, and belied by its bleak background. It's not clear whether he's failed in an effort to make us feel good about his "feel-good" movie, or, more bravely, refrained from trying to make us feel good and for the first time let us walk out of the theater troubled and wondering. What makes *A.I.* Steven Spielberg's strangest, most interesting, and (though this may sound ironic) most mature work is that, whether by accident or design, it's the first of his movies to be both a children's film—ingratiating and manipulative—and a film for adults—complex, ambiguous, brutal, and cold. Or, to put it another way, both a Steven Spielberg film and a Stanley Kubrick film.

The story for children is the one the narrator tells: his gentle, cultured voice is that of a grown-up telling a fairy tale to children—calming anxieties, explaining away apparent ambiguities, glossing over gaps and contradictions in the story, and falling conspicuously silent at moments of cruelty and horror. The way he tells it, *A.I.* is *Pinocchio* all over again, a fable about a little boy who learns how to "chase down his dreams" and becomes fully human. But the story for adults, presented visually, is very different. It's a story about hopeless human attachments and our bottomless capacity for self-delusion. David's Oedipal fixation remains utterly static throughout two thousand years, in spite of the fact that no human being—including his mother—ever shows him any reciprocal affection. The fact that his devotion is fixed, helpless, and arbitrary ultimately makes his heroism empty and the happy

ending hollow. David searches and suffers and waits all those eons for a goal that's not of his own choosing; it's irrational, unconscious—what we might call hard-wired. This is what makes him a tragic figure, and, in a way his manufacturers never intended, also what makes him human.

This is a bleakly deterministic, distinctly Freudian view of the human condition, a vision of human beings wasting their lives blindly chasing after unconscious goals just as hopelessly fixed and childish as David's—most often the idealized image of a parent. Whether we accept this model of human behavior or not, *A.I.* convincingly creates its own closed and desolate worldview. Every character in the film seems as preprogrammed as David, obsessed with the image of a lost loved one, and tries to replace that person with a technological simulacrum. Dr. Hobby designed David as an exact duplicate of his own dead child, the original David; Monica used him as a substitute for her comatose son; and, completing the sad cycle two thousand years later, David comforts himself with a cloned copy of Monica.

It's also, finally, a film about human brutality, callousness, and greed. *A.I.* is one of the most unsentimental visions of mankind since—well, since Stanley Kubrick died. David, who will become "the living memory of the human race, the lasting proof of their genius," is exploited by his creators, mistrusted by his father, betrayed by his brother, abandoned by his mother, and hunted, caged, and almost executed for the amusement of crowds. This isn't the same old story about a little boy who becomes human; it's a new story about the death of humanity itself.

The film begins with the senior design and engineering staff of Cybertronics of New Jersey discussing the next phase of robotics technology and marketing strategy. (The rain pouring down the windows, part of the global deluge brought on by the greenhouse effect, reminds us of industry's past technological triumphs.) The meeting is monopolized by a long lecture/philosophical reflection on mecha technology and the nature of love by Dr. Hobby, head of Cybertronics. But the real focus of the scene are the startling demonstrations of cruelty and degradation to which Hobby casually subjects his creations. To make a point, he stabs a female mecha's hand with a long straightpin, and she gasps in pain. His audience chuckles at his second try at stabbing her, when, in a quickly learned response, she jerks her hand away. Hobby then casually orders her to undress, and without evident affect she stands and begins to unbutton her blouse. One woman looks disturbed by Hobby's order, but, in some confusion, hesitantly applauds the demonstration anyway. Next, Hobby bids his assistant to expose herself even more shockingly; telling her to "open," he reaches a finger inside her mouth and touches a release on her palate that causes her lovely, poised face to slide apart in two pieces, revealing the machine beneath. A single tear drops from her eye and slides unnoticed down the smooth metal of her skull. Hobby's effectively made his point about mechas' incapacity for real love, hurt, or shame, but he's inadvertently demonstrated the same thing about himself and his fellow humans. The entire demonstration is reminiscent of the grotesque piece of theater in *A Clockwork Orange* in which prison officials and politicians applaud as Alex is debased and bullied—forced to lick a man's shoe, gagging at the sight of a woman's breasts. It is the audience, not the subject, whose emotional responses are tested.

As the politely sadistic meeting breaks up, the female mecha, her brain reinserted and her face seamlessly rejoined, carefully repairs the damage done to her makeup. The last thing we see as the scene fades to black is the flash of her compact mirror snapping shut. We then cut to Monica applying her makeup in her own compact mirror. The match cut identifies them as doubles, reflections of each other. Monica will be exploited by Cybertronics just as callously as was Hobby's "assistant," for the sake of a demonstration. The visual association of humans with robots will continue through the film: when Monica's real son, Martin, is brought home from the hospital, he looks far less human than the lifelike David—slumped in his wheelchair, pale and limp, dangling with plastic tubes, an oxygen mask strapped over his nose and mouth, he's a cyborg unable to breathe without mechanical aid. And he proves just as robotic as David in his single-minded possessiveness of Monica and his implacable jealousy. He and David are further doubled because they're both frozen and resurrected. In other words, this is not a film about robots, but about human beings, showing us that we are as rigid in our programming and as predictable in our responses as any machine.

Spielberg has often been accused of arrested development himself—of a preoccupation with fantasy father figures, lost children going home, broken families being reunited. This is the first film in which he critically examines those fixations. David's attachment to Monica is disturbingly ambiguous from the beginning. He blocks her way in the hall when she tries to pass with the laundry cart, mirroring her movements—the same playful/menacing game that the lecherous Mister plays with his child sister-in-law in *The Color Purple*. Later he bursts in on her in the bathroom,

catching her on the toilet reading *Freud's Women*. The heavy-handed joke only spells out the already obvious tension in the sequence. (The moment is also a fond homage to Kubrick, who gave us an uncomfortable bathroom scene in each of his films.) David creeps up to his parents' bed and hovers uncertainly over his mother with a pair of scissors in his hand, planning to snip a lock of her hair, and accidentally grazes her eye with the blade—as creepily Oedipal a scene as Danny standing over his sleeping mother with a phallic knife and croaking "Redrum" in *The Shining*.

But David's attachment to his "mother" doesn't become truly scary until she impulsively initiates the "imprinting" process. The imprinting is shot like a sacred moment, mother and child forming a tender pietà, backlit in a halo of that diffuse golden light that by now I'm afraid we have to call Spielbergian. But the visual glory of the scene belies its real import. Dr. Hobby spoke of creating a "love that will never end," a mecha that would be, in his chilling image, "caught in a freeze-frame" of perfect, synthetic, unwavering love. This is the moment that will doom David to a lifetime of unrequited love and suffering. "Does any of this hurt?" Monica asks David, echoing Dr. Hobby's question to his assistant, "How did that make you *feel*?" when he stabbed her. Later on, when David's having spinach suctioned out of his electronic innards at the Cybertronics "hospital," he brightly reassures Monica, "It's okay, Mommy—it doesn't hurt!" But it's the fact that he can't hurt that horrifies her, and she breaks out of his grasp and deserts him, leaving his hand held up in the air, empty and unfaltering. The heartbreaking image recurs when David, left at the bottom of the swimming pool after accidentally almost drowning his brother, floats alone, his face blank, arms open and empty. This is the condition to which his "love" condemns him: eternal faith in a fickle, absent mother, his arms expectantly outstretched even after he's been abandoned. It is, in this film, the human condition.

The second section of the film shifts tone as abruptly and disconcertingly as David's laughter at dinner—what Stanley Kubrick liked to call a "mode jerk." When David is expelled from his family, what he finds outside his insular, upscale home is a Malthusian nightmare—vulgar, savage, and terrifying. The denizens of this garish dystopia frantically distract themselves from incipient global catastrophe with violent spectacles and slickly packaged sex. The first words we hear uttered in this section are: "I'm afraid."

It's a female client a little nervous about her first encounter with Gigolo Joe, a suave, polished mecha prostitute. "You are a goddess, Patricia," he soothes her. "You deserve better in your life. You deserve . . . me." She needs him to tell her who she is, just as Monica begged David to tell her who she was. (The confusion between mommy and goddess will only deepen as the film goes on.) Between appointments, we see Joe checking himself out in a mirror, just as Monica did—the palm of his hand actually lights up and becomes a compact. He even adjusts his appearance and demeanor to become a touch more rough-trade for his next client, sort of Marlon Brando-ish—more like her thuggish boyfriend. Joe is custom-designed, even more frankly than David, to serve as a reflection of his clients' desires. Dr. Hobby spoke loftily about love, about metaphors and dreams, and that's all Gigolo Joe ever talks about, too. He's never crude or explicit—he's a romantic, a sweet-talking seducer who can play old torch songs on a tinny radio inside his head or dance like a Broadway chorus boy. He's the "adult" version of David, fulfilling mommy's *other* needs.

The manufacturers of these machines aren't just serving universal needs like parenting or sex; they're exploiting grief and abuse. Joe's first client has a bruise on her cheek from a beating at the hands of a human lover. "Are these wounds of passion?" he asks. She looks away, embarrassed. His next client has been not just beaten but killed by her jealous boyfriend. At first Joe thinks she's weeping, but what he had thought was a tear on her face turns out to be blood. More "wounds of passion." It's not "most women" who can be found in places like Rouge City, as Joe thinks, but the damaged ones, women who've been hurt and frightened by "real" men. Sex mechas exploit their clients' trauma and loneliness just as cunningly as Cybertronics' David was designed to take advantage of Monica's loss and maternal instincts. When we see a photograph of Dr. Hobby's dead son, we realize that David was made as a precise replica of him. For all his genius and high-minded talk, Hobby is driven by the same desperate, childish hope of bringing his little boy back to life. All these victims are trying to replace the people they loved with mechanical look-alikes.

David, lost in the woods, comes across a truck dumping a load of dismembered mecha bodies like so much garbage. The music on the soundtrack, dark and writhing, imbues these cold glistening chunks and spilled tubes with grisly implication. They are as synecdochic of suffering as the heaps of stolen watches, jewelry, and gold fillings in *Schindler's List*. Grotesquely disfigured mechas, parodies of the mutilated human form, creep warily out of the surrounding forest to pick over the heap of body parts. They've

all been discarded or abandoned like David because they've outlived their usefulness. Watching them try to fit themselves with spare jaws, twitching hands, and mismatched eyeballs, we recall that soldier on the beach in *Saving Private Ryan* who, in shock, picks up his own severed arm and carries it off with him for safekeeping. These pitiful, maculated robots are only stand-ins for human beings, who are no less fragile and expendable.

The ensuing scenes allude even more explicitly to the historical atrocities Spielberg has depicted before: slavery and the Holocaust. Mechas are hunted down and captured by humans with rifles that fire immobilizing tags and motorcycles fitted with glowing eyes and snarling jaws—near-future stand-ins for the shotguns and bloodhounds of the old South. David and Gigolo Joe are carried off to a Flesh Fair—a cross between a county fair, heavy metal concert, and WWF match or monster truck rally. Distinctively low-rent in idiom, the scene obviously refers to the vulgarity and violence of our own society, but the entertainments we see are derived from medieval favorites—victims being fired from cannons, drawn and quartered, chopped in half (with a chainsaw instead of an axe), and drenched with boiling oil (in this case, corrosive acid). We see a black minstrel-show mecha desperately mugging and jiving like Jimmy Walker, Martin Lawrence, or Chris Rock (who actually voices the character) even as he's loaded into a cannon. When he's blasted through the whining turbine and his flaming head, still grinning, lodges in the bars of David's cage, we cut immediately to black characters in the crowd rising to their feet to cheer his destruction. The most recent victims of prejudice and oppression have become the most enthusiastic new bigots. "History repeats itself," as one of the caged robots grimly explains.

What's most striking about this part of David's odyssey is that as he wanders, wide-eyed and guileless as Candide, though scenes of electronic carnage and depravity, he remains blithely indifferent to the horrors around him, his eyes fixed only on his fantasy figure of a mother, the Blue Fairy. Just as his teddy, as he's taken to the lost-and-found at the Flesh Fair, can only intone, "I need to find David. Can you take me to David? Do you know David?," earnest as the dying H.A.L., so David repeats his few articles of faith—"I'm David. Monica made me. Monica is my mommy"—as he's about to be destroyed. Before they set out on the last leg of their journey, Gigolo Joe tries to persuade David to give up his childish fantasy and face reality. Of David's sainted mother he says, "She loves only what you do for her—as my customers love what it is I do for them." This is David's real chance to cut his strings and become real, to overcome his imprinting and turn back from his misdirected quest. "Goodbye, Joe," he says. His programming doesn't waver for an instant. Later, when Joe is hauled away by the police to be executed for the murder he didn't commit, David hardly even notices, so distracted is he by his glimpse of the Blue Fairy. It's hard to believe that Spielberg can be unself-consciously holding up David's blind devotion as an admirable human ideal—what Dr. Hobby calls "the ability to chase down our dreams." Against these dark backdrops of cruelty and degradation, it looks more like a scary parody of love, a monomaniacal obsession that renders him oblivious to the ugly realities around him.

At the end of his odyssey, at Cybertronics' headquarters in the ruins of Manhattan, David (like David Bowman before him in *2001*) finds a weirdly ordinary room occupied by his own double. Another "David" is sitting cross-legged in a chair, as chirpy and affectless as David was before his imprinting. Our hero reacts to his double in the same way that his own brother Martin reacted to him: with instant loathing. But unlike Martin, who tried to get rid of his own usurper with sneaky tricks and set-ups, David just smashes his rival's head in with a lamp. A delirious low-angle shot frames him against the circular overhead light, exulting over his dead doppelgänger, shouting his own name and whirling the dented lamp above his head like hairy Moon-Watcher screaming in triumph over his twitching rival and throwing his bone club in the air. Like both Moon-Watcher and his distant descendant, H.A.L. 9000, David finally demonstrates his humanity by committing murder.

He then wanders into a room full of replicas of himself, racks of them hanging like suits, blank-faced and open-mouthed. He looks out through an eyeless mask of his own face (blindness, remember, is Oedipus's punishment for his incestuous sins) at what he'd thought was his own first memory: the angelic art deco statue that he remembered as a bird with outstretched wings. His image of God is a lie. We see a line of child-sized boxes labeled "David" and "Darlene," all condemned to lives of helpless devotion to selfish, weak, mercurial human beings, and probably doomed to fates just as sad as David's—disposal, abandonment, destruction. It's important to understand here that David's life of thralldom, and his awful disillusionment, doesn't necessarily reflect some tragic, inevitable part of the human condition; his condition has been deliberately manufactured, programmed into him to make him a better product. Cybertronics has engi-

neered all his anguish from the beginning, taking advantage of Monica's grief and choosing Henry for his "loyalty to the firm." The slogan for their new line of surrogate child mechas, "At last a love of your own," is the ultimate marketing strategy: selling love itself as a product.

We cut to David sitting blank-faced, devastated, one shoelace dangling, on a ledge hundreds of feet above the ocean. In spite of his shattering insights into his origins, he's still pitifully limited by his initial imprinting: like the dying medic in *Saving Private Ryan,* his last word is "Mommy." He lets himself topple over the ledge to fall hundreds of feet down the face of Cybertronics' headquarters. David's been destroyed by the same amoral, shortsighted profit motive that's condemned the whole human race. He sinks through the water in his recurring posture of unrequited yearning: alone, adrift in amniotic darkness, looking blankly out at us, his arms open in an empty embrace. This is the image of David that lingers with us, not the cozy dream of contentment in which we'll leave him.

On the dark ocean bottom, at the end of all hope, David finally glimpses his dream. He descends in his amphibicopter into the murk of Monstro's lair at Coney Island. His spotlights illuminate a tableau of Gepetto creating Pinocchio that recalls David's own imprinting, the crouching figures similarly silhouetted against radiant, streaming backlight. Then he ascends a broad stairway like the steps leading to a temple altar, where at last he sees her, standing alone like the image of a goddess: the Blue Fairy, beautiful as Botticelli's Venus, streaming with seaweed. Her serene face, reflected in the cockpit's bubble canopy, merges with David's yearning one, an image of emotional fusion. The two women who are the object of his lifelong search, Monica and the Blue Fairy, are really one. When the Ferris wheel, nudged by the 'copter's passage, slowly topples over, trapping them underneath, David is oblivious to their plight—his only thought is relief that "the Blue Fairy's all right"—but Teddy observes, "We are in a cage." It's a cage not only of rusting metal but of David's own arrested desire. "Please, Blue Fairy," he implores the plaster icon. "Please, please, make me into a *real live boy*. Please. Please, please, please, Blue Fairy. *Make me real*." The camera draws back as his litany continues through the dark centuries. It's impossible to imagine, at this point, that Spielberg intends David's literal-minded idée fixe, repeated like a stuck record for millennia, to be anything other than pitiful.

Another "mode jerk": we emerge from an icy white mist, the blankness of extinction. Hushed, elegiac choruses sing as a futuristic craft flies over the barren plain of ice that now entombs the Earth. We descend into deep chasms cut into the frozen ocean, gliding through vast corridors as eerie and beautiful as an abandoned cathedral, where in the dim blue light we can see figures excavating the ruins of a human city. Our only heirs are the highly advanced robots who step out of this craft—sleek Giacomettis with nodes of energy flowing through the circuitry inside their glassy bodies. These are clearly robots designed and built by other robots, bearing only a vestigial resemblance to the vanished human figure. They look in wonder at a more exact copy, David. "This machine was trapped under the wreckage before the freezing," one explains. "Therefore, these robots were originals. They knew *living people*." Raucous, brawling humanity has finally exterminated itself. The Earth is a dead world.

Spielberg gives us two endings to the film, superimposed over one another but utterly dissonant in tone. In effect, he gets to have his cake and eat it, too, giving us the childish dream of reunion we long for while showing us that it's a hopeless fantasy. And this accounts for the dramatic critical divide over the film; critics who saw the ending as only happy hated it; those who understood it as deliberately hollow, and saw through it to the darkness beyond, called it brilliant. However brightly the children's story may end for David, the grown-ups can't help but notice, in the background, the death of the human race. Just as the saving of the six hundred couldn't quite redeem the horror of the Holocaust in *Schindler's List,* this upbeat ending is so thin and meaningless that it can't obscure the larger tragedy. Spielberg is showing us how myopically we focus on our own trivial love stories while all around us, dimmed by the glow of our own happiness, the world is dying.

David does get what he wants, just as we get our happy ending, but neither of them is quite what it seems. David, reactivated, comes to in a facsimile of his old home, as uncannily familiar and alien as the Louis XIV suite David Bowman finds at the end of his odyssey. But the film stock is grainy, and the colors too harsh, like an old Super-8 home movie. This isn't really his home, but an artificial environment, threatening and strange. The robots who have constructed this habitat for him speak to him through an image of the Blue Fairy: "You are so important to us," they tell him. "You are unique in all the world." They're trying to tell him everything he's always longed to hear—that he *is* one of a kind, treasured now as a singular, irreplaceable artifact, that he is loved. These words are at last literally true, but, tragically, David can't hear them.

He still wants only the same thing he's been programmed to want since his imprinting: the concrete image of his mother. He offers up the magic lock of her hair, trembling with rage and triumph. "Now you can bring her back," he tells them, in a voice like steel. "Can't you." The moment succeeds in inducing a shiver, but it is, nonetheless, a meaningless victory. What makes all of David's persistence and tenacity empty is that his goal is not freely chosen. He can no more account for his fierce devotion to Monica than Gigolo Joe could for the fancy footwork with which he punctuated his singsong patter. "That's just what I do," he explained.

Finally, giving up in the face of his chilling determination, the robots decide to "give him what he wants." One of them tries to explain to David that what they're creating for him isn't real, and can't last; the genetic copy of his mother will only survive for one day. "Maybe . . . maybe she'll be special," says David, wishing out loud. "Maybe she'll stay." The robot gently tries to dissuade him of this idea, but, like any child or fundamentalist, David can invent an endless number of rationalizations for why what he wants must be true. "Maybe the one day will be like the one day in the amphibicopter," he tries. "Maybe it will last forever." The robot recognizes how sadly stunted he is: "I thought this would be hard for you to understand," he sighs. "You were created to be so young." Finally, defeated by David's stubborn literal-mindedness, he tells him to go to his mother, as a false dawn appears in the holographic "window."

But notice that these sentient robots are no less deluded than David; they, too, have inherited humanity's sense of incompleteness and misplaced yearning. The narrator confesses that he envies humans "their spirit." "Human beings had created a million explanations of the meaning of existence, in art, in poetry, and in mathematical formulas," he says. "Surely human beings must be the key to understanding the meaning of existence." His paean to the genius of humanity echoes kind of hollowly, since about all we've seen human beings do in this film is fuck and destroy robots, and each other. Just as humans tried in vain to replace their own lost loved ones with mechanical copies, our robotic successors now strive, with their unimaginable technologies, to replace us. The film brings this futile effort full circle as David, who was himself created as a replica of a dead human child, is comforted with a cloned copy of his own long-lost human "mother."

What the robots give David is, inevitably, a kindly lie, like the lies we tell our own children—that we'll never leave them, that we'll never die—or the lies we demand from our popular storytellers—that the hero will find his heart's desire, that love will prevail. "All problems seemed to have disappeared from his mommy's mind," marvels the narrator, trying to pass off as a miraculous gift horse a change that is in fact ominous and telling. This new Monica is utterly unlike the one we remember, who was ambivalent, conflicted, and distant, alternately affectionate and freaked out by her fiercely clinging "son." In other words, it isn't the real Monica. She's a fantasy figure, custom-made to answer David's desires. But it doesn't matter to David, who can't distinguish image from reality. "There was no Henry, no Martin," the narrator continues, "just the two of them." It's the ultimate Oedipal wish fulfillment, a dream date with mommy without rivals or distractions. She's been reconstructed for him as a perfect reflection of his desire, just as he was for her.

Most tellingly of all, every episode in David and Monica's "perfect" day together—the giggly game of hide-and-seek, the haircut, the birthday party—is a happy distortion of some ugly incident from their real life together. The only games of hide-and-seek they ever played were when Monica shut him up in the hall closet so he'd quit spooking her and, later, when she deserted him in the woods. She never gave him a haircut in real life, although he, memorably, did once cut hers. And the only birthday party he ever attended was the disastrous one that ended with his expulsion from the family. What in real life was marred by Oedipal tension and trauma here becomes unambiguously innocent. It's David's defective fantasy of what a happy mother and son should be like. His carefully censored, Disneyfied recreation mimics the way in which our own selective memories—and our movies—falsify the past. He's rewriting his own history as dishonestly as *Amistad* or *Schindler's List* does ours, bathing everything in a blinding Spielbergian haze of nostalgia.

But the illusion is a tenuous one. "David had been told not to try to explain to Monica," says the narrator. "Otherwise she would become frightened and everything would be spoiled." "Spoiled," indeed; imagine Mommy's reaction if she were to understand that she's actually a clone of the person she thinks she is, a 2000-year-old corpse resurrected for only 12 hours in a world empty of any other human beings. She finally succumbs to an everlasting sleep, murmuring the words David has waited two millennia to hear: "I love you, David. I do love you. I have always loved you."

Thus the narrator gives the kids a happy ending to his fairy tale, David contentedly drifting off to "the

place where dreams are born"—presumably that magical realm of love and metaphor of which Dr. Hobby spoke. Even positive reviewers rolled their eyes over this ending, calling it typically sappy and sentimental. But this closing image of David falling asleep in his mother's arms is neither mawkish nor ridiculous. It is utterly desolate. David is trapped in his "one perfect moment," the only moment of happiness possible for him. At his "birthday party" he admitted that he has no more wishes to make. He will lie beside the dead form of his mother for eternity, just as he sat imploring the Blue Fairy for two millennia, still and silent and utterly at peace. Dr. Hobby designed him to be "caught in a freeze-frame," and so he is; Speilberg's visual metaphor for love is being caged, frozen.

David has been given a comforting illusion, like the one Spielberg's narrator offers us in this ending, if, like children, we choose to believe it. An illusion is all David has been chasing for 20 centuries. His gaze fixed on this goal, he remains blind to his own cynical exploitation, to the death of his family and friends, even to the end of the world. Like a child, or a credulous audience, he is content with the mere image, "a *representation*"—a story. But, as the real Monica tried to tell him long ago, "stories aren't real." In reality, he's asleep in an artificial fantasy, alone in an empty, ice-bound world. He's like Jack Torrance as we last see him in *The Shining,* grinning deathlessly out at us from that photograph on the wall of the Overlook Hotel—happy and fulfilled, finally home, frozen forever in Hell. And we, watching this ending with tears in our eyes, are like those soldiers in the final scene of *Paths of Glory,* who finally break down crying not over the carnage they've seen or for their unjustly executed comrades, but over a schmaltzy lullaby, mourning the memory of their own lost mothers.

Tim Kreider's cartoon, "The Pain—When Will It End?," appears in the *Baltimore City Paper* and on his website at www.thepaincomics.com. He has authored or co-authored three previous reviews for *Film Quarterly*.

Notes

My online debate with Rob Content for *Lip* magazine (www.lipmagazine.org) was invaluable in clarifying my thinking about *A.I.* Boyd White's editorial counsel was, as always, infallible. Allison Smith gave critical advice at the eleventh hour.

1. Frederic Raphael, *Eyes Wide Open: A Memoir of Stanley Kubrick* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 107.
2. NAU97, "Screenplay Message Board: Movie Talk: *A.I.*" www.ezboard.com (2 August 2001).

Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train

Director: Patrice Chéreau. Producer: Charles Gassot. Writers: Danièle Thompson; Chéreau; Pierre Trividic. Cinematographer: Eric Gautier. Kino International.

Not you, lean quarterlies and swarthy periodicals
With your studious incursions toward the pomposity of ants,
Nor you, experimental theatre in which Emotive Fruition
Is wedding Poetic Insight perpetually, nor you,
Promenading Grand Opera, obvious as an ear (though you
Are close to my heart), but you, Motion Picture Industry,
It's you I love.
In times of crisis we must all decide again and again whom we love.

—Frank O'Hara[1]

And I love *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train*. Not the motion picture industry—far from loveable these days. Just *this* motion picture. More than any other I've seen in over half a century of moviegoing. More, perhaps, than I can say.

I first saw Patrice Chéreau's romantic drama about a funeral and its aftermath in 1999 and I've been trying to write about it ever since. Over the past 35 years I've managed one way or another to confect essays short and long on such diverse fare as *Seven Women, The Chelsea Girls, Shampoo, Desert Fury,* and *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*. But something different came into play this time out. Like so many turn-of-the-century gay men, I've been to a lot of funerals. Consequently it took some doing to gauge the impact of a work that captured them so completely—their curious mixtures of sadness and giddiness, joy and despair. But that wasn't all. For *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* (1998) is a film that strongly resists standard forms of analysis; it's an "object" working against the grain of objectification, as "impossible" as one of its characters happily describes herself.

There's a plot of course, which can be simply said to deal with the events following the death of a charismatic, manipulative painter named Jean-Baptiste Emmerich ("a very minor late twentieth-century master," he declares on a tape-recorded interview heard in snatches throughout the diegesis) and with the lives of his survivors, who consist of a small smattering of blood relatives and a much larger "family" of lovers, ex-lovers, and hangers-on. Covering a 48-hour period that includes the quarrelling and commiserating mourners' train ride from Paris to Limoges (site of the largest cemetery in Europe) for the internment, the narrative achieves critical mass at a get-together at the family estate after the ceremony. Lucien, the deceased's identical twin brother (Jean-Louis Trintignant gets a dual role), has it out with his long-estranged son, Jean-Marie (Charles Berling), who always preferred his gay uncle and "spiritual father" to his "real" one. Quotes are required around these terms, for the film is nothing if not an attack on the validity of sanguinary ties. The emphasis is on the family Jean-Baptiste created of his many lovers and their subsequent lovers and wives—and even children. The chosen family is put into further relief by its chief "widow," François (Pascal Greggory), one of Jean-Baptiste's ex-lovers, who is still deeply in thrall to him. Moreover, François's relationship with his present lover, Louis (Bruno Todeschini), is starting to unravel—a process accelerated when the latter during the course of the trip meets Bruno (Sylvain Jacques), a street hustler who we learn has been involved in the past both with François and Jean-Baptiste.

Such melodramatic circumstances—very much in keeping with the grand operas, *Lulu* and the *Ring Cycle,* through which Chéreau first made his mark—aren't as "obvious as an ear," as O'Hara would have it. For Chéreau and his collaborators have contextualized them within a network of mini-melodramas detailed in a brisk, matter-of-fact fashion. There's the failed (yet somehow still vital) marriage of Jean-Marie and Claire (Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi)—she trying to break free of the drug addiction that still holds him in its grip. Drugs likewise figure in the deeply troubled life of Thierry (Roschdy Zem), the thug-like male nurse who was also a lover of the deceased and whose bratty daughter Elodie (Delphine Schiltz) has been left—in an act of sheerest perversity—the bulk of Jean-Baptiste's estate. And then (what melodrama would be complete without one?) there's the mystery woman, Viviane, who is in fact a transsexual formerly named Frédéric (Vincent Perez).

But who is he/she exactly? A straight (excuse pun) answer about anything is hard to come by in a work like this. For *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* can't be easily broken down into separate scenes, sequences, or even shots like a normal—or even experimental—film. It's a constant cascade of sound/image events without a center that never gives us easy access to a pivotal scene or beautiful image or *grand syntagmatique*. Even when the final credits roll, a simple sense of "The End" is withheld. Still there is a beginning—or, more to the (quasi-Godardian) point, a *beginning* to the beginning—to all of this.

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Lovers, ex-lovers, old friends, and all the others who took the train

"It started the day [French documentary filmmaker] François Reichenbach said the line in 1993," co-screenwriter Danièle Thompson recalled.

> He was very sick, I went to see him in the hospital, and suddenly he said to me quite flippantly, "By the way, I want to be buried in Limoges." I knew that his family came from that city, but I dodged the subject and joked: "No, not Limoges, it's a long way away, who wants to go to Limoges?" That's when he said that magnificent line: "Those who love me can take the train." And there we were, all of us on that train to Limoges. It was a very strange trip, rather jolly actually, with people of very different ages, origins, and situations. François was someone who partitioned off his relationships so there were people who didn't know each other at all, and others who knew each other very well, and had had affairs, or had aged, old bachelors who'd become elderly gentlemen, nephews and nieces.[2]

In other words, it was a gay family funeral—typical of so many of those that occurred in the late 80s and early 90s. Suddenly, men who had never married were discovered to have left "widows" and broods of what can only be called offspring (former boyfriends, boyfriends of former boyfriends, sometimes even casual tricks) behind them. And often these ties were shown to be far stronger than those of authentic relations—who, often as not, were hostile strangers given to plundering everything the deceased left behind simply because they had legal title. In *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train,* no one dies of AIDS as Reichenbach did (though one of the principal characters is HIV-positive). But Chéreau's film wouldn't have been made in the "before time" of gay life, even though Reichenbach, who haunts it in ways far more extensive than the obvious ones would suggest, was a key player in that world.

"[Reichenbach's] documentaries are noted for their detail and sharp insights," notes film critic Sandra Brennan. "[He] made his debut in the mid-50s and has gone on to helm both short and feature-length cinéma-vérité documentaries, including the Oscar-winning *Arthur Rubinstein: Love of Life* (1970)."[3] Of his *Impressions de New York,* critic Raymond Durgnat observed:

> Like a chameleon's tongue, Reichenbach's camera flicks out and slicks up its prey. It has eyes out on stalks like a lobster's, looking for oddities which are also typicalities. Its zoom lens snakes out, wraps itself around a potential image like an elephant's trunk, tears it bodily out of the earth of gross reality. He shoots into the sun and lets the flare sprawl all over the screen. Just as the sharp disc of the sun produces the flare on the film, he lets brute facts exude screen poetry.[4]

One would think this alone would qualify Reichenbach as a chief exponent of cinéma-vérité filmmaking. Yet that movement's critical high priest, Louis Marcorelles, has absolutely nothing to say about him in his study of the form, *Living Cinema,* thus lending Reichenbach a place apart comparable to that of Louis Malle with the New Wave. Being rich, both filmmakers could be reflexively dismissed by the others (all middle-class and lower) as dilettantes. But while he was a cinematic outsider, socially Reichenbach was one of the biggest insiders of all time in the gay world of post-World War II Europe. In *Intimate Companions,* his fascinatingly detailed "triography of George Platt Lynes, Paul Cadmus, Lincoln Kirstein and their circle," writer David Leddick notes that in the 1950s, Platt Lynes "continued to give great all-boy parties (liquor was frequently paid for by François Reichenbach, a rich, rather fey Frenchman, nephew of Jacques Guerin, a quite talented documentary movie maker and heir to a French fragrance fortune."[5]

Yet for all of this, Reichenbach didn't seek to remain within the confines of the gay beau monde. He came to the U.S. and shot the (slyly homoerotic) *Les Marines* (1957) and *Amérique Insolite* (1958). He covered the anti-Vietnam war movement in *The Sixth Face of the Pentagon* (1968), and followed his seemingly mainstream Arthur Rubinstein film with *Medicine Ball Caravan* (1971), an ill-fated attempt (edited by Martin Scorsese) to create a "Woodstock on Wheels" with a traveling show of musicians crossing the United States. In the 70s his footage was used by Orson Welles for *F for Fake*. In 1982 he served as director of photography on *Forty-Deuce,* Alan Bowne's play about gay hustlers, directed by ex-Warholite Paul Morrissey (in the split-screen style of *The Chelsea Girls*).

Yet where Reichenbach fit so well, would Chéreau have done the same? To judge from both *Those Who Love Me* and his earlier *L'Homme blessé,* not really. While artistically tending toward the neo-classical (the better part of his career devoted to mounting plays and operas from the accepted canon), Chéreau personally—which is to say sexually—is something of a radical. Not at all Reichenbachian either physically or temperamentally, he's from a younger, edgier, *out* generation—closer in style to Arthur Tress than George Platt Lynes. And unlike the latter (and his would-be disciple Robert Mapplethorpe), Chéreau doesn't merely evoke the bizarre, he revels in it. The characters assembled here, outlandish as they might be in the hands of others, are matter-of-fact to him, and he treats them as such. One can, however, easily see Chéreau playing "François" (the student) to Reichenbach's "Jean-Baptiste" (the mentor)—if only symbolically. For the principally stated (and restated) touchstone for the film's dead gay painter isn't the becalmed Platt Lynes contemporary Paul Cadmus, but the roiling Francis Bacon. Like Bacon (whose name is frequently invoked in the narrative), Jean-Baptiste had a taste for "rough trade," i.e., Thierry. And such roughness was idealized even more strongly by Chéreau via the Vittorio Mezzogiorno character in *L'Homme blessé*, a schizophrenic tramp with whom the teenage hero (Jean-Hughes Anglade) falls madly in love.

But that was a relatively simple affair compared to *Those Who Love Me,* which begins and ends with the highly "civilized" François—a Chéreau self-portrait enacted by his own ex-lover. And so the filmmaker spares us nothing and no one—not even himself. But what "self" is involved in the last analysis? For *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* began with a scenario inspired by François Reichenbach, initially scripted by Thompson, revised by Chéreau and co-scripter Pierre Trividic, and then revised yet again via the embodiment of its characters by Chéreau's direction of an extraordinary cast—its final form clearly taking shape in the viewer's memory.

A humming noise. A distant clatter of metal. A gulping sound as a head slowly looms into view. It's a simple pan up François's face. He's clearly disoriented. Does he know where he is? It is as if he'd just emerged from sleep, or even suspended animation. We don't know where he is either. But we will in a beat or two, as the lights in the Gare d'Austerlitz café blink on, and we see other random shots of trains, lights, and people moving to and fro.

François is sitting alone in a railway car, peering through the window and looking up into the light. Mirroring his unease is a voice we hear on the soundtrack, that of his lover Louis, stammering as he prepares to interview Jean-Baptiste: "Can we do a sound test?" Jean-Baptiste dutifully supplies his name and particulars:

"April 1926 in Limoges. Factory owner's son. A small factory. A family business." François is playing this recording back to himself as he sits waiting for the others to arrive. "Not porcelain, but shoes. In Limoges you're either in teacups or pumps. Is that OK?" Told by Louis that it's a sound check, he begins anew, brightly: "Well, let's give it a social slant. 'Préfecture de la Haute-Vienne.' '*Préfecture de la Haute-Vienne*!'" He laughs explosively. "A bourgeois family—what else is there to say?" And as if on cue, we meet two characters about whom there's much to say: Sami (Nathan Kogen) and Bruno. It's a passageway elsewhere in the station, and the old man passing the young hustler asks him where he can find the train for Limoges. They move off in separate directions, only to come together again almost immediately, though this initial meeting is never acknowledged.

Bruno's identity is, of course, obvious; Sami's less so: he's one of the "old bachelors who'd become elderly gentlemen." But we can't see that yet because we're listening to Louis's voice asking, "But that was rather bureaucratic, no?" And so Jean-Baptiste cheerfully details the banality of his bourgeois family: "More or less Catholic, more or less a medium-size business, more or less fell on hard times, more or less collaborators," likening them to a centipede—and classifying himself as "Centipede Jr." He pauses for a reaction from Louis, only to burst out with a chuckling, "Is that what you want?" as we see Louis's face for the first time. He's arriving at the station by subway, rushing into the café to see the others as Chéreau cuts not to faces but to reflections on countertops, coffee cups, and colored lights. Like the trains and the tape recorder, they seem to have a life of their own far in excess of the humans. Then Louis sees Bruno and falls in love.

If *L'Homme blessé* hadn't already made it clear in its railway station scenes, *Those Who Love Me* confirms Chéreau's standing as the poet laureate of cruising. He understands its mise-en-scène like no one else (not even Warhol in *My Hustler*), and reproduces the delicate ballet of male/male advance and retreat between Louis and Bruno in such a way as to render the coup de foudre palpable. But at the same time (Chéreau always does at least two things at once) we hear Jean-Baptiste's voice again: "Ta, ta, ta, ta, tah." Repeating his curriculum vitae as a station schedule board flips destinations and times, he reiterates the particulars of himself and of the "centipede" as "Our Love," a song by Sade (the first of many numbers on the music-besotted soundtrack), begins to play. Jean-Marie arrives, Dominique (Thierry de Peretti), a student/trick of Jean-Baptiste's, hands out train tickets to all, and the dance of Bruno and Louis continues. Then Sade is interrupted. For we have cut to a shot of Dominique standing expectantly in the midst of the station (almost an echo of the opening shot of François). He's on the lookout for Claire—whom we see rushing toward the station drugstore. But he's also a figure in space—suspended much like those flayed figures in Bacon. And what he "sees," if the next cut is to be interpreted as a reverse-angle shot, is Jean-Baptiste's empty studio. Chéreau's camera rests on it a beat in silence before cutting back to Dominique as we hear Jean-Baptiste talk of his father, who died of cancer though he "never touched cigarettes or drink or my mother." The sound of meshing gears returns as at the opening, and the camera pans down a numbered railway sign and the sight of a metal device locking into place as the words *Ceux Qui M'aiment Prendront le Train* hit the screen.

As Chéreau would have it, "the title sounds like an order—but actually a rather gentle order—it instills a competitive spirit in the survivors." But there's nothing gentle about that. In fact, as we learn, this competitive spirit was Jean-Baptiste's chief weapon. "The dead man bullies the living but, at the same time presents them with a fabulous gift: his disappearance."[6]

But is this gift so fabulous after all? As we watch the mourners gather on the railway station platform an uneasy, distracted air predominates, underscored when Bernard (Olivier Gourmet), the most pathetic of all the Jean-Baptiste hangers-on, walks right up to François and asks (referring to Louis), "Is he your fiancé?"

"That's not the word I would have used," Louis remarks shortly afterward. "Then how would you describe our bond," François asks. It's a question the entire film asks of all its characters as bonds dissolve and reassemble in a different form. Like Elodie—first seen as a free agent, pushing her way through a crowd of adults to grab a sticky chocolate treat off the concession stand, then chatting with Sami. He in turn indulges her, while handing Jean-Marie a photo of his mother (who had a "special laugh") taken standing next to Jean-Baptiste in Alexandria in 1967. Touched, Jean-Marie tells Sami to keep the photo: "I have my own memories of her." But when Elodie snatches it away and runs off, Jean-Marie chases her to get it back.

Nothing is more telling about Chéreau's art than his refusal to give us a close-up of this photo. He uses the same strategy when Elodie, looking out of the train window, sees the car being driven by her father, Thierry, with the coffin containing Jean-Baptiste's body, and shouts, "It's Papa!" Chéreau does not slow down to savor the moment, though it's the film's central bonding point—an image of presence and loss in

one. The car quickly hurtles off-screen as Jeff Buckley's "The Last Goodbye" saturates the soundtrack and mourners peer through the window. And as the song plays, the next voice we hear is Jean-Baptiste on tape. "C'est dommage, c'est dommage, c'est dommage," he snaps, speaking of how difficult it is for a painter to put sexual passion on canvas—and continues, with reference to Thierry. "He swipes everything. Loving people means putting up with their shit." It's a perfect subtitle for the film.

"He was no Picasso, but a painting of his could be traded for a TV set. A really good TV set," Thierry tells a hitchhiker—who's shocked at sharing a car with a coffin—in a description of artistic worth only a junkie could offer. And only a drama queen would add, as Thierry does of Jean-Baptiste's last days: "I threw them all out! The old woman, all of them!"

"You are essential to my life," Louis (another drama queen) begins to François, having sighted Bruno on the train. It's the kiss-off line supreme, as François well knows, replying, "Like a drug." Informed that this sudden change of romantic direction has taken place "just since the station," François administers the coup de grâce. "Did he tell you he's HIV-positive?" Thus Louis learns that Bruno was François's drug as well.

The train has come to a stop at at La Souterraine, and Chéreau turns this station platform into another stage set, this time for a primal confrontation between Jean-Marie and Claire. She castigates him with memories of how Jean-Baptiste "warned" him against her, and then begins to hit him, screaming "You're a coward" as Thierry's wife Catherine (Dominique Blanc) does her best to pull her off. Then, fearful that Jean-Marie will strike back, Catherine spills the beans—that Claire is pregnant with his child. In contrast to this dramatic extreme, Louis quietly stays behind as the train pulls away. He will, of course, return. But now we're in Limoges, where Jean-Marie runs wildly through the cemetery with the camera rising on a crane to disclose its awesome length and breadth as Bjork's "All Is Full of Love" is heard. He is looking for the father he claims to despise. And seeing him by the family plot, a look of calm weariness on his face, it appears for a moment as if a tender reunion is in the offing. But this respite passes quickly as the funeral rites begin. Viviane makes her grand entrance just as the car with the coffin along with the other mourners arrives—greeting the sight of Lucien as if Jean-Baptiste had come back from the dead.

"Listen to me. Listen to my forever friend," says Sami in English, and begins to read a poem whose opening lines are: "In my dreams I am always saying goodbye and riding away." Then Jean-Marie embarks on an aria-like diatribe in which he claims the deceased was "fed up" with the centipedes and "dumb family gossip. He didn't want to be a father. I wonder if anyone wants to be a father. He always hated families. They stink of death and dirty tricks." A shot of Jean-Baptiste sitting grimly alone in his studio as The Doors' "Break On Through to the Other Side" strikes up is the overture to the film's last act. Viviane asks, "What happens now?" "I think I'll go jerk off," says Jean-Baptiste appropriately, as a kind of organized frenzy ensues, with cars driving off to the tune of "Save the Last Dance for Me." Louis suddenly reappears, scurrying across a roadway and perhaps catching sight of Bruno (who clearly sees him) in one of the cars on its way to the family home. And it's there that the sniping over who Jean-Baptiste "really" was—and really loved—accelerates. Viviane is horrified as François elects to tell the weepy Bernard that Jean-Baptiste insulted him behind his back. Viviane calmly tells Claire that she was Frédéric. Lucien assumes full paterfamilias mode, indulging Elodie and flirting with Viviane. Chéreau then takes us to Jean-Marie and Thierry fighting. "I got him his smack! He wanted to die in my arms and that bugs you all," Thierry bellows. More messy fighting, and then a diminuendo commences as the various figures withdraw to their corners to lick wounds both real (Bruno) and metaphoric (everyone else). Viviane recalls confronting his father in his new "pre-op" state. "Heart attack?" he laughs, saying the old man simply slugged her. But who is this father? Jean-Baptiste? He died of a heart attack, but surely wouldn't have reacted quite this way—or would he? Lines are being deliberately blurred, particularly when François asks her, "How do you like your family now?"

Meanwhile Thierry is on the nod from a new fix, watching a horror movie on TV featuring the image of a man's head breaking through another man's chest. But it's the familial horror story that's about to climax, with Jean-Marie confronting Lucien, who is showing Viviane the family wine collection and uncorking a few choice bottles. Jean-Marie wants to talk, but Lucien forecloses any words his son might have to say: "I know Claire is pregnant. I know you're careful with money. I know you'd rather die than ask me for help when you're strapped. I know you don't act like a rich kid. I know you don't throw money out the window. I know I raised you right." Mustering a final burst of power in an aria that climaxes his entire career, Trintignant then spits out the last lines: "You didn't have a father, but I had a son. And a brother who blabbed. He said if you had no talent you wouldn't go to art school.

And you didn't go. Where did your money come from? Your uncle? Your spiritual father? Not from the Arts fund. From the Centipedes slush fund. So fuck you!"

Thus Chéreau delivers the ultimate anti-Oedipal scene. How can the son reject his father when the father knows rejection is built right into the entire system? "I was inspired by my father," Chéreau has said of *Those That Love Me,* "who incidentally had the same first name [Jean-Baptiste]. Maybe that's why I don't show the character's paintings. I wasn't so much interested in what he had painted as in what he had taught his students, his friends, all his sons. But I feel that I am everywhere in the film and not only there where I seem to be. . . . In fact, I'm in it all over the place."[7]

And that would mean his interests were *maternal* as well. For as vital as Lucien's rage is Vivian's tenderness. "I'm a simple girl," she says, speaking of her dream of being a baker's wife, dispensing fresh rolls and other goodies on Christmas Eve. More conventional still is her insistence on the primacy of relationships: "If one lover dies, the other can tell the witnesses that it wasn't a dream—he was loved." Viviane gives Bruno her blessing, seeing him off as he heads from the house to the hotel where Louis is staying. "I'm for love," she says. But our very last image of her is alone in the bathtub, whimpering when she can't get the hot water to work. It could be the start of another film. But Chéreau is intent on finishing this one with a curtain call that might be called the postmodern equivalent of the one that ends *Midnight* (Mitchell Leisen's 1939 film, where all the characters exit with a final line or gesture). François is looking up at the window of the hotel room, where he can see Bruno and Louis in each other's arms. And instead of another pop tune about love, the adagio from Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony starts up as François gets into a cab and orders it to drive away. He passes Claire and Jean-Marie on the street—she happily waving to him. Then he sees Thierry, truly abandoned by all, trying to hitch a ride in another direction. And then we don't see François at all for a while. The camera is on high. It's soaring across the landscape: roadway, train track, the Emmerich mansion (Lucien can be seen standing at the window), and finally over the cemetery, where François can be seen walking toward Jean-Baptiste's grave. "Alone at last," one can almost hear him say. For he can now properly mourn the man whose love meant so much to him.

It was this evocation of mourning in general, and what it means to gay men in particular, that most strongly drew me to this film. But once there I found something more. For *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* doesn't depict gay life as a "problem" to be solved. The narrative neither privileges nor stigmatizes it. Rather, it's allowed to exist on-screen with full three-dimensionality, never asked to explain itself. In point of fact it's the heterosexuals who require explanations in a manner that's quite without cinematic precedent. Not surprisingly, the finale in this most verbal of films—which begins the moment François leaves the hotel and gets into the cab—has no dialogue or voiceover commentary whatsoever. Everything has been said. Only one thing more remains to be seen.

"For a homosexual," Michel Foucault (doubtless from personal experience) observed, "the best moment of love is likely to be when the lover leaves in the taxi. It is when the act is over and the boy is gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice. It is the recollection rather than the anticipation of the act that assumes primary importance in homosexual relations."[8] How very Proustian of him. But is that all that we're seeing here? François is in the process of recollecting something more than "acts." And so is Chéreau, for rather than remaining with François, he has the camera take flight yet again over the gravestones. And that's a fitting juncture for the end credits to roll, and for us to take leave to deal with other matters in life before we face our own death once again . . . in that real space we call "off-screen."

David Ehrenstein's writings have appeared in many other journals; his books include *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928-2000*, *The Scorsese Picture: The Art and Life of Martin Scorsese,* and *Film: The Front Line—1984*. He is a past contributor to *Film Quarterly.*

Notes

1. Frank O'Hara, "*To the Film Industry in Crisis*," first published in *The Hasty Papers: A One-Shot Review,* 1960; *The Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 232.
2. Interview with Danièle Thompson in press notes provided by Kino International, 1999.
3. Sandra Brennan, "François Reichenbach," *All-Music Guide,* www.allmusic.com.
4. Raymond Durgnat, *The New Wave* (United Kingdom: Motion, 1963), 49-50.
5. David Leddick, *Intimate Companions* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 268.
6. Interview with Patrice Chéreau in press notes.
7. Ibid.
8. James O'Higgins, "Sexual Choice and Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality," interview with Michel Foucault, *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1981-Winter 1983); reprinted in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture—Interviews and Other Writings,* ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 297.

The Gleaners and I (Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse)

Director: Agnès Varda. Photography: Stephane Krausz; Didier Rouget; Didier Doussin; Pascal Sautelet; Varda. Zeitgeist Films.

You know from the first shot of *The Gleaners and I* that this is no conventional movie. A cat stares from the screen at the camera, a cello is heard. We're entering very personal territory: the mind and heart of Agnès Varda as she gleans from the world a feature-length collection of episodes, people, scenes, art works, all somehow related to the ancient but still extant practice of gleaning. This is a film of playful, magical delight and delicacy. Audiences applaud at the end; they're surprised and grateful to feel so good as they leave a theater. In fact, the film generated so much enthusiastic mail that Varda has produced a follow-up, *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later,* which is included in the DVD now in release; in it, she revisits people we meet in the film, "to see how they were doing."

Gleaning, as Varda first shows us via the Larousse dictionary definition, is the gathering of crops that hired pickers have left behind. Hardly a familiar subject these days, though with an intricate history—and as it turns out, infinite ramifications. But here at the beginning, we know only that the choice of subject is novel: we're going to learn something intriguing. And indeed, as Varda works around and through her ostensible subject, we explore with her many levels of meaning behind gleaning, a word that gradually expands its meanings to become a shimmering, shifting metaphor.

The film is loosely organized as a series of about a dozen portraits, the first of a farm woman who doesn't glean any more. In her hard childhood, gleaning meant survival, though it was also a congenial social activity. Today, she says, the harvesting machines are too efficient. But we soon see that this is not altogether true: gleaning has made a comeback. Varda turns up gleaners in misty northern potato fields, in sunny orchards of the south, in vineyards, in oyster flats, in urban streets.

The French law of gleaning goes back to 1544; we see it learnedly expounded by a robed attorney standing in an artichoke patch and ruminating among cabbages and tomatoes. The law originally aimed to benefit the poor, the wretched, the deprived; but maybe those who now do it for fun are also salving a deprivation? Later, another attorney, a woman, explains the precise sequence of legal status incurred by a television set dumped on the street and picked up, either to be repaired or rifled of its copper coils.

Gleaners are of course pleased that the harvesting machines are not too efficient. Moreover, industrial agribusiness lets mountains of perfectly edible food go to waste because it doesn't meet precise marketing size standards or has minor blemishes. Too-big potatoes are dumped back on the fields. Varda picks up a collection of heart-shaped ones to take home; later we see them rotting. "I love to film rot," she says. The gleaners know there are rules for when and where and how gleaning can be done, although they're not publicized.

Varda reenacts Jules Breton's *La Glaneuse*

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Varda gleans a heart-shaped potato.

Explicating the 1544 law of gleaning

In an oyster-gleaning sequence, there is a wackily charming discussion of exactly how far from the cultivated beds gleaners must stay, and how many oysters they're permitted to pick up. Gleaners are individualists: nobody agrees with anybody else.

Gleaning is hard, but it's better than shoplifting, declares a man who lost his truck-driving job for drinking, and now lives on welfare in a gypsy-like trailer encampment outside some nameless town. "We're not afraid to get our hands dirty," he says. "You can wash hands."

Varda enjoys surprising us. After a scene in a spotless restaurant kitchen turning out gourmet meals, she takes us to the fields where the chef is gleaning herbs for his expensive dishes. His parents taught him, he explains. In the kitchen, Varda asks him about what he does with waste. "We don't throw *anything* away," he declares, and tells her about his gourmet uses of leftovers.

From Varda's film, you feel yourself becoming quite expert about the state of gleaning in France today. You learn the distinction between *glaner* (picking up stuff on the ground) and *grapiller* (salvaging fruit left on trees or vines). Fancy vineyards mostly toss their leftover grapes on the ground, fearing that gleaners might try to make wine from them—though Varda manages to find a kindly vintner who lets people glean and even warns kids not to oppress their digestions with over-many grapes. She gets someone to explain about second-crop grapes, which have no wine-making value and thus can be gleaned. She also drops in on Laplanche, a Lacanian psychoanalyst-philosopher who happens to be a vintner as well. By this time we understand that gleaning for Varda is also a metaphor for her filmmaking: she gleans from the world a wildly miscellaneous collection of images, sounds, people, ideas.

Gleaning also becomes a symbolic bond, between people and food mainly. But then Varda extends it to urban detritus: the immense amount of stuff that city people toss out on sidewalks is mined by determined and ingenious salvagers.

Gleaning redeems waste, which qualifies as a modern deadly sin. Some gleaning is done by people who eat what they collect. Some of it, however, is done for others—we see gleaners from a charity program loading 700 kilos of potatoes into a station wagon and an African immigrant gleaning for himself and his housemate, but also for neighbors in the slum where they live.

One of the basic charms of *The Gleaners and I* is that we're never sure where Varda will go next with her material, because her responses are so complicated: she's fascinated by odd people, she's curious about ecological issues, and she examines everything with an artist's eye. Between portraits, the film includes several brief visual poems: one, to kale and sunflowers, reminds us of their sheer beauty. Another arises because, in filming an abandoned vineyard that a gleaner family had discovered (they sing beautifully as they pick), Varda accidentally left her lens cap off and the camera running; but she kept the result, a "dance of the lens cap," set to a bit of jazz.

Focusing on a truck with a hand-iris

Varda rides her material whimsically from region to region, sometimes simply getting captivated with the visual; there is a long (maybe too long) sequence of "catching" trucks on the highway, irising in on them with her hand in front of her tiny camera. But in the end we realize that this is not an idle sequence: these trucks are everywhere, hauling food and other goods to and fro at an immense expenditure of petroleum in the modern industrial-agribiz mode. The trucks are in fact a key element of the hugely wasteful system to which gleaning is a response, and like the rest of the world, Europe is busily constructing new and vastly subsidized highways for them.

In another interstitial sequence, Varda returns to her apartment in Paris and shows us the mold that has grown on her leaking ceiling while she was away in Japan. She whimsically places a gold frame around one particularly beautiful patch. But the mold fungi are detritovores: they make once-living material into nutrients for the next round of living beings. The sequence ends somberly, with Varda reflecting "I am an animal I do not know" as she explores one age-spotted hand with her camera held in the other.

This touching self-exposure about aging pops up several times in the film. As anyone in the film world knows, Agnès Varda is not a kid. She has made great films in a wide variety of modes (among them *Opéra Mouffe, Le Bonheur, Cleo de 5 à 7, Les Créatures, L'une chante, l'autre pas,* and—perhaps her masterpiece, mixing fiction and documentary in a way that anticipates *The Gleaners—Vagabond*); she was long married to director Jacques Demy; she has been a fixture of the Left Bank film community which paralleled the Nouvelle Vague and was sometimes considered to be part of it. Now, in that French manner Americans cannot fathom, she thinks of herself as at death's door, though she is visibly vigorous still. In one slow-motion sequence, partly included to show off the endearing tricks of video photography, we see her gently combing her thinning hair. Later, an artist gleaner friend finds her an art deco clock face that has lost its hands; she proudly installs it on her mantle, saying triumphantly that now she need not see time passing.

The essay-film on this accomplished level is a rare thing; only fellow-Parisian Chris Marker is as good at it as Varda is here. This mini-genre is a kind of transcendence of ordinary documentary. *The Gleaners and I* looks deceptively easy, but has marvelous layers of complication. Nor was it cheap to make (it has an extensive credit list). But it reminds us how much talent and devotion can accomplish with modest means. We're ravished by the beauty of Varda's images (astonishingly, captured on a digital-video camera that we frequently see in her hand). We're touched by the wry humor of how she thinks—and edits. We're astounded by the breadth of her culture and sympathy: how at home she is with artists, how easily she talks with the down-and-out. There's a comfortable solidarity here: "I never forget those who shop in the leftovers." She's as easy with the strange people who live by gleaning as with people who glean as an ethical statement.

The Gleaners is like a large and comfortably full sack of gleaned images—and sounds, including an old

Agnès Varda and her digital-video gleaning machine

kids' song about eating potatoes every day of the week. There is Jules Breton's famous painting of a woman gleaner—although, as Varda reminds us in confidential voiceover, traditional gleaning was seldom solitary. (Later, we see Varda herself wryly reenacting it, posing with a tiny sheaf of wheat over her shoulder.) And we also get to see Millet's equally familiar painting of women gleaners. During a flood in the Jura, Varda has to detour, and is delighted when a flock of sheep blocks her way. Then she shows us a drowned sheep. As she drives through the rain, Varda stops at a junk store where she finds a painting in which Breton's and Millet's gleaners have all been merged into one scene; Varda gleefully takes this amateur pastiche home. For reasons unclear (maybe it's about gluttony?), she uses one of her expeditions to track down Van der Weyden's terrifying *Last Judgement*, and shows us in close-up the bodies falling into the fiery pit.

But she also brings in artists working today: Hervé with his "cavern" filled with junk that he will convert into wonderful forms; Louis Pons, who is fascinated by "useless things" which can be combined into complex three-dimensional shapes; a Russian immigrant brick-mason who builds huge fanciful sculptures filled with dolls. Varda moves easily among all the arts, but as a true cinéaste she manages to bring the origins of film into her collection. She takes us to the farm that belonged to Jules Marey, who first recorded motion on film: the flight of birds, a cat walking, a poodle jumping, a bicyclist—images of pure visual delight. She is also a filmmaker alert to social process, so she gives us the story of a group of feckless and probably homeless youth who quarreled with a supermarket manager over messing up the store's dumpster. We get conflicting stories from the kids (for whom Varda evidently composed a rap song), the manager, and the judge who heard the case—all convinced they see contemporary gleaning aright.

In hanging around street markets after they close, Varda follows a man who picks up discarded food from dumpsters. He turns out to be immensely voluble about waste, a connoisseur of sell-by dates. He has a job, he says, "and Social Security," but gleaning is an ethical thing for him: he gleans to fight waste, tramping about neighborhoods in his high rubber boots. And Varda meets a shy fellow who's constantly gleaning—and immediately eating—vegetables and fruits. It turns out that he's a vegetarian with an MS degree in biology. He sells magazines at a railway station (or tries to) and lives in a suburban shelter, where he teaches French in the evenings to illiterate African immigrants. This dedicated and selfless man impressed Varda the most of anything in the shooting, she says. Then, in a characteristic afterthought, she adds that another big thing was her tracking down in a provincial museum back room a large painting of gleaners fleeing a storm. At Varda's request, the curators lug it into the gusty outdoor light. She doesn't have to say so, but we look at the painting and know that we all, in our ways, are gleaning before the storm.

Ernest Callenbach founded *Film Quarterly* in 1958 and was its editor until 1991. He is also the author of *Ecotopia* and *Ecology: A Pocket Guide*.

Book Reviews

An Accented Cinema

Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking

By Hamid Naficy. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001. $27.95.

Finally, a book that brings together the work of exilic filmmakers as disparate as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Jonas Mekas, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Hamid Naficy is to be credited for his attention to cultural specifity with regard to his study of exilic, diasporic, or "accented" cinema. Naficy avoids all-encompassing categories such as "third world cinema," "diasporic cinema," and other totalizing, essentialist labels. Instead, his book takes pains to point out the commonalities and great cultural differences in films whose authors are exilic, or Naficy's preferred term, "accented." Pointing out the specific identity markers of individual filmmakers, Naficy finds stylistic and thematic similarities in their memory-driven, often multilingual narratives. Whether they are displaced, expatriated, nomadic, or exilic, *An Accented Cinema* culls together the work of accented filmmakers, most of whom live in the West. Naficy's treatment of differences in cultural production, consumption, aesthetics, and agency through creativity is a major contribution to the study of transcultural cinema.

Historically situating accented cinema, Naficy explains that most accented exilic filmmakers are from developing and postcolonial nations. Some arrived in the late 1950s as a result of Third World decolonization and invasions of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Many more arrived with the sociopolitical upheavals of the 1980s and 90s. Ruptures in global economies, ethnic wars, the rise of militant Islamic power, and changes in European, American, and Australian immigration policies led to more displacements. Exilic filmmakers often straddle identity markers. They are both or neither when it comes to ethnicity and nationality. A good case in point might be Claire Denis, actually a figure not included in this volume, who is both and neither French and African, and whose work shares much in common with that of such filmmakers as Chantal Akerman, Jonas Mekas, and Mona Hatoum (who are included in this study). Indeed, Naficy includes an appendix of components of accented style that accurately reflects the work of Claire Denis and other *beur* filmmakers (Algerians and North Africans of Arab origin who were born or live in France). Recurrent topics such as home-seeking and home-returning journeys are manifested in a quest for wholeness as much as they are a reflection on split identity. Authorship is inscribed in much accented cinema through autobiographical gestures and the use of autobiographical narratives, often highlighted by the presence of the filmmaker herself and/or the device of the authorial voiceover, as in the films of Chantal Akerman.

Many accented/exilic filmmakers explore and invent new aesthetic territories. For example, Trinh T. Minh-ha problematizes narrative space and time, the validity of objectivity, and employs self-reflective strategies, especially in such strategies as having actors "play" characters in documentary style. Trinh's emphasis on asynchronicity, fragmented and repetitive narrative, and multiple and fluid subjectivity is evident in much accented cinema. Other strategies of nomadic filmmakers include an approach to spectatorship that reflects the variety of audiences they address: different ethnic subjects, communities, and tongues. On a more practical level, Naficy explores the exhibition venues and diverse financing schemes that mark the accented cinema, including international television, public support, and collectives around the world.

Perhaps the most fascinating section of the book highlights the notion of space and the special meaning of space in exilic film. Space as it relates to home is implicit in any discussion of displaced and intermediary identities. Drawing upon Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope (time/space), Naficy explores the open and closed systems of time/space in exilic films. Borders, airports, train stations, ships, planes, and trains are sites of safety and liberation. Idyllic chronotopes or utopic time/spaces are depicted in family, community, and idyllic spaces. The impossibility of returning home is drawn in scenes that conjure wars, urban sprawl, border patrols, and nostalgia. Gender, while sometimes fluid and non-normative in exilic cinema, is at other times reinscribed and perpetuated in patriarchal themes, as exemplified in Yilmaz Güney's *Yol*. *Yol* follows the journey of five convicts in Turkish society. As Naficy points out, social control is embodied in Islamic patriarchy. *Yol* itself, Naficy argues, is cinematically crowded and rife with patriarchal social control mechanisms. The closed-shot compositions, the crowded frames, and the atmosphere of constant surveillance emphasize the claustrophobic nature of such communities. Women in the film are silenced subalterns with a lack of voice and agency.

Another fascinating methodological choice is to look at the epistolarity of the form of many accented exilic filmmakers' works. Atom Egoyan's films use epistolarity as a counterhegemonic approach. Letters, answering machine messages, telephone calls, faxes, e-mails, and the use of titles, calligraphic text, and many voiceovers testify to the epistolary quality of accented cinema.

Naficy spends considerable time chronicling the often collective production mode of accented cinema in the histories of such collectives as the Black Audio Film Collection, Sankofa, Ceddo Film Workshop, and Retake Film and Video Workshop. Isaac Julien, for example, was closely associated with both Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective in Britain before he struck out on his own to make *Young Soul Rebel* (1991) and other diasporic feature films. Channel 4 Television, in Britain, supports, commissions, and distributes films that grasp the notion of diasporic identity. British-Asian diasporic identity typifies ambivalence and hybridity. Gurinder Chadha's *I'm British But . . .* (1989) includes a section in which subjects try to identify themselves and find

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themselves British but maybe Welsh; Asian, but not Asian; Irish, not Irish hybrid; Scottish Pakistani; or British as well as Asian.

Naficy's treatment of Mona Hatoum's and Chantal Akerman's films places them within fluid identity markers and as epistolary mother-daughter texts. *News from Home*, for example, by Chantal Akerman, a Belgian exilic filmmaker, is a sort of letter to her mother, herself an exile of the concentration camps of WWII. *News from Home* consists of lengthy takes in which Akerman reads letters to her mother in voiceover. Hatoum's *Measures of a Distance* is structured by letters she has received from her mother in Lebanon; English translation is employed to read the letters, originally written in Arabic. Naficy concludes that such gestures provide an example of the dynamics of erasure and inscription. Always looking for elements of political agency, he succeeds admirably here.

Refering to *beur* cinema, Naficy explains that the term *beur* is self-descriptive black slang meaning Arab; however, the term has increasingly pejorative associations because of growing French xenophobia and racism. *Beur* cinema includes a growing collective of communities encompassing other formerly colonized French ethnicities. *Beur* themes include postcolonial examinations of hybridized, multiple identities. In the 1970s, *beur* filmmakers were primarily interested in self-representation; many *beur*-produced documentaries of this period reflect the complexities of identity, racism, unemployment, and exile. Feature-length *beur* cinema arose in the 1980s, with many films featuring utopic dreams of a return to home and community. The return home often turns out to be traumatic, as in Rachid Bouchareb's *Cheb* (1990). Though a few women, such as Aïssa Djabri and Farida Belghoul, make *beur* cinema, it is generally, Naficy contends, male-dominated and tends toward documentary-like realist narratives about men's struggles. Algerian auteurs such as Mehdi Charaf and Merzak Allouache feel the burden of representation of their culture, yet they reject critics who sometimes call them crossovers or sell-outs. As Allouache, director of *Bab El-oued City* (1993), maintains, "My cinema is a dialogue I have with my people." Yet *beur* cinema itself is a shifting category, and it is perhaps its very instability that lends itself to aesthetic enrichment.

More popularly known *beur* cineastes include Tony Gatliff. Born in Algeria, Gatliff makes films that explore gypsy identity in Europe; he is especially dedicated to capturing Roma music. Naficy doesn't problematize Gatliff's interest in capturing Roma culture, but are his films really all that different from Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*? Perhaps this is because Naficy is more interested in *beur* culture as it is expressed in *La Haine* (1995), directed by Mathieu Kassovitz (a Jew of Hungarian origin). What really brings *beur* people together is shared experiences of racism and unemployment, so in a sense, poor whites are essentially *beur*. Naficy does point out that *beur* culture, especially raï music, has become chic and is appropriated by more commercially oriented cinema. The agency of *beur* filmmakers, their ability to change society, Naficy concludes, is limited by the fact that they must operate within the increasingly conglomeratized capitalist global economy.

But exilic filmmakers' place in society and their ability to voice experience and challenge systems is, in Naficy's terms, "performative," and this performative element is the most important political element of *beur* cinema and accented cinema. The performative value of cinema as a sort of living and speaking body is at the center of studies such as Fatimah Tobing Rony's *The Third Eye* (1996); Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness* (1993); E. Ann Kaplan's *Looking for the Other* (1997); Jacqueline Bobo's *Black Women Film and Video Artists* (1998), and my own work on decolonized exilic women filmmakers. The ethics and strategies of performative strategies are astutely grappled with in *An Accented Cinema*. Naficy looks at the performative expression of deterritorialization, nationhood, and strategies such as self-reflexivity, doubling, self-inscription, masquerade, mimicry, and even the importance of performing poverty, as in the case of Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988). Naficy briefly considers the politics of "performing poverty" in an aside about criticism of Nair for her film's narrative of Chillum, a smalltime dealer who is extensively humiliated onscreen. As Naficy concludes, "This is not uncommon. Third World insiders frequently lodge this sort of accusation against their own filmmakers who deal with society's poverty and marginalia, even though the same films win plaudits from Western critics as exemplars of realism" (272). Clearly, Naficy sides with the filmmakers here, in this controversy and others. Some may wish he was more critical of the politics of exilic filmmakers, but this is not his project.

Perhaps one of the weakest points of the book, in a way, becomes the strongest argument in its favor. It is highly theoretical, engaged, and careful, yet it is celebratory and inclusive. I, for one critic, applaud this methodology, as it allows for the exposure to and criticism of border films and filmmakers. What other book brings together Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) with Nina Menkes's *The Great Sadness of Zohara* (1983)? An apartheid exists even in postcolonial, postmodern cinema. *An Accented Cinema* breaks down the walls of this apartheid. My only qualms about the book are subjective. There are filmmakers I'd like to see considered in this volume who are not, and of those considered I'd appreciate lengthier considerations. However, my objections are easily countered by the fact that authors ought to be allowed their personal preferences, and to consider these exilic filmmakers at greater length would take up an encyclopedic space. *An Accented Cinema* gestures to such a space, but in the meantime offers a solid and subjectively comprehensive volume that will make a fine text in the graduate classroom as well as a valuable reader that one may turn to repeatedly.

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster is Associate Professor in the Department of English, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and Editor-in-Chief of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Her most recent books include *Captive Bodies: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Cinema*, *The Films of Chantal Akerman*, and *Troping the Body: Etiquette, Conduct and Dialogic Performance*.

Australian Cinema in the 1990's

Edited by Ian Craven. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001. $57.50 cloth; $24.50 paper.

Australian Cinema in the 1990's is a fine collection of essays—lively, provocative, engaging, and an excellent contribution to scholarship on Australian cinema. As contributing author Ben Goldsmith has commented, Australian cinema in the last decade has become a cinema of "noise": "Unburdened in the 1990's of the policy expectation of previous decades that filmmakers should produce and promote a singular version of Australian national identity . . . noisy cinema conjures some sense of its heteroglossic or multi-accented character. . ." (115).

The majority of the films discussed in this book focus squarely on contemporary Australia, yet the authors all have a strong sense of Australia's film heritage, linking it to their discussions of current films while acknowledging the ways in which current films challenge the past ideologically and aesthetically. The essays open up many new areas of inquiry: "creative disabilities," the "glitter cycle," life in the suburbs, as well as films that not only rework Australia's creed of mateship and masculinity, but also focus on the troubled areas of ethnicity and heterosexual relationships. There are also in-depth analyses of specific films—*Babe*, *Idiot Box*, *The Castle*—and a chapter on Aboriginal star Ernie Dingo. Editor Ian Craven notes the decade's "remarkable diversity" in his introduction, "Australian Cinema Towards the Millennium."

In chapter 2, "Patterns of Production and Policy: The Australian Film Industry in the 1990's," Lisa French gives an informative overview of the infrastructure of the Australian film industry, prefacing her analysis of the 1990s with a summary of 70s and 80s financing strategies: government funding (federal and state) in the first decade, private monies in the tax break period during the second. Since 1988, the central government funding agency has been the Australian Film Financing Corporation (FFC), which kicks in with loans at preferred rates when at least one-third of the budget is secured from private sources via a pre-sale or distribution deal. As she notes, the health of the FFC is dependent on breakout films, such as the popular *Shine* (1996) or *Muriel's Wedding* (1994), to offset losses. Yet only ten percent have returned their original investment. Significantly, the FFC has been criticized for its financial aims, which have frequently taken precedence over cultural and aesthetic ones.

Private investors in film are composed of locally owned companies—Beyond Films, Southern Star, Village Roadshow; all either distribute and/or exhibit. Companies based overseas with branches in Australia include American-owned Miramax and Fox Searchlight. (French-owned Pandora and Dutch-owned Polygram have also invested in Australian films.) In light of a strong overseas financing presence, Lisa French is somewhat guarded about the future with regard to the cultural integrity of films and the industry, noting that the admittedly small local film industry is up against increasing pressures of globalization amidst international agreements. For example, GATT—the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade—which is intended to remove trade barriers between countries, threatens to take away protective measures for a "fragile system of cultural difference" (33). Though Australia has laws in effect to protect its film and broadcasting industries, these laws could be perceived as "restrictive" practices preventing deregulation.

In chapter 3, "Unhappy Endings: The Heterosexual Dynamic in Australian Film," Nigel Spence and Leah McGirr acknowledge filmmakers' increasing awareness of the complexity of the heterosexual dynamic—"the physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural forces which operate within a relationship" (39)—and a culturally troubled terrain. Acknowledging the origin of this group of "personal relations" film in the 80s (a term coined by Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka), the authors focus on three films, one from the 80s, *Monkey Grip*, and two from the 90s, *Chez Nous* and *Love Serenade*. The authors see *Monkey Grip*, an obsessive relationship between two addicts (one to heroin, the other to emotional and physical closeness), as a precursor to the 90s focus on "modern life, modern morals . . . fraught with a complex of physical and emotional burdens" (40).

Chez Nous, a social realist film like *Monkey Grip*, features familial entanglements and interpersonal relationships problematized by ethnicities and cultures. The film charts the last days of a marriage as well as the dissolution of a fragile domestic ideal. *Love Serenade*, on the other hand, a "quirky, surreally-edged tale," is a black romance/comedy featuring two spinster sisters. As a way out of their mundane lives in a small town, they vie for the attentions of an alluring supernatural man. The authors note that in these and other 90s films " . . . even the best relationships are characterized by dysfunctionality because there is some kind of unbridgeable gulf, some essential incomprehension, some incurable enmity, between Australian men and women" (54). Nevertheless, " . . . the heterosexual relationship[s are] depicted with a greater sense of the 'real'—the relationships seem more genuine, as if there is a firmer desire to understand what men and women really think, and how men and women actually behave" (53).

In chapter 4, "Creative Disabilities in Contemporary Australian Film," Liz Ferrier sees a thematic permeating many films in the 90s (as well as in earlier films): "an embattled artistic individual, suffering from a disability or difference which isolates him or her socially, manages to find solace and ultimately social recognition, through creative performance and self-expression" (58). Despite their disabilities—for example, mentally challenged in *Shine*, blind in *Proof*, socially inept in *Muriel's Wedding*—individuals succeed through creative expression (frequently before some sort of audience): piano playing, taking pictures, dancing/singing (respectively). Ferrier sees this as a metaphor for the local film industry: "less an expression of a growing collective concern for the socially disadvantaged than an articulation of anxieties and mythologies about the viability of local cultural industries in the context of deregulated international markets" (63). Thus, Australian films can be a

"vulnerable" body in this marketplace, where loss of control over cultural boundaries is a worry. This is a fascinating approach for what could be termed a national pathology, linked to Australia's self-image, and informing a good number of Australian films—undertones of cultural cringe (Australia's lack of self-confidence) and fears about Australia's ability to shine (pun intended), to succeed, to be noteworthy.

Next, Phillip Butterss focuses on four films that reflect changing patterns of masculinity in "Becoming a Man in Australian Film in the Early 1990's: *The Big Steal*, *Death in Brunswick*, *Strictly Ballroom*, and *The Heartbreak Kid*." Using Peter West's sociological survey of boys and men's roles/attitudes in Sydney (entitled *Fathers, Sons and Lovers*), Butterss explores how these films challenge the traditions of heroic male leads such as Bryan Brown, Paul Hogan, and Jack Thompson: ". . . boys must be tough . . . and must not show emotion." As Butterss notes, the films he examines make "profound criticisms of [this model of] hegemonic masculinity, show[ing] that the old unitary notions of masculinity are no longer sustainable in a multicultural society. . ." (92).

The protagonists in *The Heartbreak Kid*, *Death in Brunswick*, and *Strictly Ballroom* are gentle and sensitive, or learn to become so—the "wild colonial boy" is now a ballroom dancer, as in *Strictly Ballroom*. As Butterss notes, *Ballroom* casts aside typical Australian competition in favor of self-expression and is (ultimately) a celebration of unity—performers and audience. Buttress also includes a nice section which explores the films' more progressive ideas on women—a chance for equality and cooperation with men in *The Big Steal*, *The Heartbreak Kid*, *Death in Brunswick*.

In chapter 6, "His Natural Whiteness: Modes of Ethnic Presence and Absence in Some Recent Australian Films," David Callahan explores strategies for understanding representations of ethnicity, arguing that the conflict between Aborigines and white colonizers is the most psychically significant and charged. As he notes, many well-intentioned white filmmakers, such as Fred Schepisi (*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*) and Peter Weir (*The Last Wave*), have received scalding reviews, suggesting the deep collective guilt and unresolved tension conjured up by this historical conflict. Callahan also cites the critical importance of ethnic films made by Aborigines, such as Rachel Perkins' *Radiance*, the first commercially oriented Australian movie featuring Aborigine women.

Callahan claims the key issue in ethnic identity is "belonging." "The discomfort aroused by the psychic maneuvers required to accommodate dealing with belonging without dealing with Aboriginal/white relations ensures, then, that other non-Aboriginal ethnicities provide welcome [less guilt ridden] material through which belonging can be dealt with as a theme. . ." (97). Yet frequently, these other ethnicities are dealt with in a superficial manner via invisible ethnicity or an "attentiveness to the ethnic mix of Australian society, but no attention to this ethnicity as culture" (100). Callahan cites the cursory treatment of Vietnamese characters in *Romper Stomper*, or the Japanese in *The Custodian*.

In some films, white characters assume an Aboriginal position—displacing attention from the historically persecuted, while focusing on the "psychic malaise" of the whites. This is aptly demonstrated by the neo-Nazis in *Romper Stomper* "claim[ing] the same moral right to belong as the Aborigines. . ." (106). Callahan is quick to point out that filmmakers shouldn't be chastised for choosing and exploring white ethnicity, noting that this is a viable topic that needs further exploration. The task is to "break . . . down the assumed naturalisation of this centrality . . . in stories [where] . . . whiteness is shown to be cultural and just as ethnic as any other position" (102).

In chapter 7, "All Quiet on the Western Front? Suburban Reverberations in Recent Australian Cinema," Ben Goldsmith does close analyses of *Metal Skin*, *Idiot Box*, and *The Castle*. The first two are aggressively disturbing works about alienated and deeply disturbed young people on the fringes of Australian society, while the third focuses on a genteel family in "a sentimentally appealing, cozily domestic suburban idyll. . ." (129). *The Castle* is a fantasy tonic for the first two—a strong family unit determined to stick together to survive larger forces that threaten to usurp its homestead. As its patriarch and moral center, Darryl Kerrigan fills in for the lost fathers and amorality of *Metal Skin* and *Idiot Box*.

In chapter 8, "Romance and Sensation in The 'Glitter' Cycle," Emily Rustin notes that this genre is characterized by a " . . . luminescent and colorful visual style [wherein] protagonists . . . assert themselves in contradiction to the social/familial backgrounds which have enclosed and restricted their desires" (133). The Glitter Cycle aesthetic and narrative form is clearly opposed to 70s films—pretty, period, nostalgic, tasteful—and is a deft blend of drama/melodrama and comedy/satire, with a strong influence of the musical. Rustin performs close analyses of *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, and *Strictly Ballroom*. As she notes, both *Muriel's Wedding* and *Priscilla* are send-ups of small-town Australian life, the former on the Gold Coast, the latter in outback towns, and *Strictly Ballroom* is a satire of Anglo-Australian culture.

Tara Brabazon's "A Pig in Space? *Babe* and the Problem of Landscape" examines *Babe*, the extraordinary 1995 success within and outside of Australia, but a film which denied its Australianness. As Brabazon notes, "there are no Australian accents, native wildlife or recognizable landmarks" (156). Brabazon focuses primarily on *Babe*'s landscape, contextualizing its "pastoral ideology . . . affectionate and nostalgic . . ." (154) amidst other filmic renditions and discourses on Australian nationalism. In this rather circumspect essay, Brabazon seems in a quandary: how to identify *Babe*'s Australianness. She notes that *Babe* summons a "distinct repressive nationalism" (156)—an intriguing idea, but what are the characteristics and implications of this "nationalism"? Further, Brabazon's language and arguments can be difficult to follow (for example, "*Babe*'s frame is a heterotopic visuality, where multiple ideologies are collapsed and othered" [155]).

In chapter 10, "*The Castle*: 1997's 'Battlers' and the Ir/Relevance of the Aesthetic," Stephen Crofts notes that *The Castle*—featuring the Aussie-battler Kerrigan family, whose home and domestic bliss is threatened by an encroaching airport—was a wildly popular film, grossing $10 million with a low budget of $700,000. He examines *The Castle*'s televisual sitcom style—static camera, awkward editing and framing—which reinforces the film's domestic milieu and its close-knit family. Given the popularity of Australian television programs within the country, and the difficulty of local films competing in Australian theaters with Hollywood films, the film's style, budget, and intimate approach made good sense. (All of the filmmakers were veterans of the television satire series "Frontline.") Crofts ties *The Castle* in nicely with the Howard government. The Kerrigans' honesty and hard work are not dependent on the welfare state or structural unemployment, and thus "meshed perfectly with anti-welfare discourses" (169) promoted by this administration in the late 90s. Crofts also notes the film's racial anxieties: Darryl Kerrigan identifying with Aboriginal dispossession and the film's slur about "wogs" (the catch-all term which includes the film's immigrant groups, Lebanese, Greeks), reflecting reconciliation as well as Australia's increasing multiculturalism.

In chapter 11, "*Idiot Box*: Television, Urban Myths and Ethical Scenarios," Kay Ferres sees this black comedy—featuring two suburban unemployed young men actively living their lives based on their daily television fare—as a way to reexamine television spectatorship and "reconfigur[e] . . . academic and popular discourse about television" (176). She readily acknowledges that this film "explicitly pushes the buttons of contemporary urban panic: fears about listless unemployed youth, perceptions of an increase in crime and the failures of public policy in addressing these problems" (176). Though the two leads are duly inspired by their favorite television crime drama, which propels them toward their failed bank heist, the film, as Ferres points out, does not simply take the fall-back position of blaming television for society's ills, but explores the role of television via voyeurism, active spectatorship, and commodity of exchange as part of a larger discourse about suburbia. Ferres also explores the ways the film charts the evolution of gender roles for the two leads. They take refuge in their strong bond of mateship, "an essential urban value" in their alienating environment. Yet within their privatized internal setting—the domestic space of home and television viewing—they embody what has traditionally been a feminine space.

In chapter 12, "Ernie Dingo: Reconciliation (A Love Story Forged Against the Odds?)," Alan McKee focuses on the media image of Aboriginal star Ernie Dingo, a popular television personality and television/film actor, who is an affable and nonmilitant Aborigine. Dingo's persona, as McKee points out, differs from versions of Aboriginality represented in documentaries and social realist genres, where Aboriginal indigeneity is presented for (white) viewer consumption as "a form of civic duty" (189). Dingo's genial and nonaggressive presence in the media promotes "a particular kind of reconciliatory discourse," notes McKee, in the wake of white Australian/Aboriginal Australian reconciliation efforts, "a process [to] help . . . heal the wounds of [the] past . . . [in order to] build the foundations upon which the rights and affairs of indigenous Australians may be dealt with in a manner that gives respect and pride to all of us as Australians" (192, McKee quoting Aboriginal activist Patrick Dodson).

McKee examines Dingo's role in "Heartland," a groundbreaking epic television miniseries, "one of the most significant representations of Aboriginality ever produced in Australia." "Heartland" features Dingo as a police liaison officer, mediating between white and Aboriginal cultures, and (as in real life) having a love interest who is white (Dingo is married to a white woman). Some of the episodes were written by Aborigines, and one by Dingo himself; further, the Aboriginal people who worked on this series were in training for key creative positions. Though McKee endorses Dingo as a crucial person in a spirit of reconciliation in political affairs and in the media, he wonders whether Dingo, one Aboriginal man, carries "far too great a burden of representativeness in Australia" (205).

There are two valuable resources at the end of the book. Samantha Searle provides a useful filmography for the decade, broken down according to year with director, producer, scriptwriter, and production company. Linda Smith has compiled an informative bibliography covering a variety of books, periodicals, and government publications.

With its detailed analyses and ambitious scope appropriate for undergraduate and graduate students, *Australian Cinema in the 1990's* complements Tom O'Regan's *Australian National Cinema* (1996), and updates Susan Dermody/Elizabeth Jacka's two-volume *The Screening of Australia* (1988) and the sequel, *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the late 80's* (1988).

Susan Barber is an associate professor at Loyola Marymount University; she is writing a book on Australian Cinema.

Cassavetes on Cassavetes

Edited by Ray Carney. New York: Faber and Faber, 2001. $25.00.

In *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, Ray Carney compiles remarks made by John Cassavetes in interviews, television appearances, production notes, and publicity materials during his decades-long career as actor, director, and screenwriter. In addition to Cassavetes' own words, the book also includes extensive commentary by Carney, aimed at contextualizing and explaining Cassavetes' comments. The book alternates between Cassavetes' words and Carney's, with so much emphasis placed upon the latter—his words are in boldface and run close to Cassavetes' words in quantity—that the title is really a misnomer. For truth in advertising, the book should be called *Carney on Cassavetes on Cassavetes*. The book

does present a fascinating glimpse into the life and work of Cassavetes, but one feels less like one is reading what the book jacket calls "the autobiography [Cassavetes] never lived to write" than the biography Carney wishes he had written.

Often reviled, or, worse, neglected in his time, at least in the United States, since his death in 1989, Cassavetes has come to be regarded as one of America's most compelling directors—progeny of Italian Neorealism, kissing cousin to the French New Wave, and godfather to contemporary independent American cinema. Certainly, Ray Carney has been an important force in redeeming Cassavetes' reputation over the years. He has arranged significant retrospectives that exposed a new generation of audiences to the films, written program notes for those retrospectives, and published three previous books on Cassavetes that are virtually the only book-length studies in English. Due to this dogged dedication to promoting Cassavetes' work, Carney had direct access not only to Cassavetes in his later years but also to Gena Rowlands and friends and associates like Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara, and others who provided crucial information and stories for this book. Carney may, therefore, be the most obvious scholar for assembling this project, and he has brought an impressive quantity of material together. However, I would argue that Carney seems to be protecting his ownership of the Cassavetes franchise in the way he assembles the text; thus the book is shaped too much by his personal vision of Cassavetes.

Rather than let Cassavetes' words stand more or less as they were spoken or written, and thus demand an active reader, Carney has adopted a set of extremely idiosyncratic editorial policies that control the reader's access to Cassavetes' words and, to a large degree, predetermine their interpretation. First, rather than preserve the integrity of individual interviews or articles, Carney has cut and pasted years of material into fragments sorted by subject. Thus, for instance, all comments about the movie *Faces* are placed together, regardless of their origin. Second, while there is a bibliography of published materials at the back of the book, Carney has omitted any system of citation from the quotes themselves, so that even the most assiduous reader will be unable to determine the origin or date of a given quote. Third, Carney has arranged the text chronologically, moving from Cassavetes' childhood through his years as actor and director to his death. But while the subjects are chronological, the quotations are not, and, because the quotations are not identified, one never knows if one is reading Cassavetes' thoughts at the time, or his reflections from a later date. In addition, there is no index, so it is impossible to move through the text out of sequence, looking for passages about, say, Peter Falk, or improvisation. Instead, one must follow Carney's construction and read chronologically. This is especially frustrating because, finally, the book seems much too long. It is over-edited in the ways I list above, but it is also curiously under-edited, including, for example, numerous repetitive statements from Cassavetes about the conflict between art and commerce. Given that Carney has seemingly selected passages carefully to create this chronology, it seems strange that he selects so many arid and recurring comments.

Certainly, for scholars, this extremely idiosyncratic editing is maddening. However, while this might seem to be scholarly nitpicking, these issues seem to me to be quite central to anyone's experience of the text. Carney himself states repeatedly that Cassavetes was a master at using speech to achieve his goals: he would lie to a friend, cajole a producer, taunt an actor, or provoke a critic to get the desired result, or simply to get a response. It is odd, then, that Carney treats Cassavetes' words as if their meaning were transparent. Surely, Cassavetes might couch his words differently when speaking to *Women's Wear Daily* versus addressing an American Film Institute seminar, versus an interview in *Screw* magazine; and he might discuss a film differently when he is promoting it than he would later when he knows the film has bombed at the box office.

In the clearest sign of the editorial presence guiding this book, all of Cassavetes' words are bracketed by Carney's commentary, which sometimes states the obvious and sometimes seem to impose his vision of Cassavetes. In one instance of the former, Carney tells us that "Cassavetes occasionally expressed anger at the stupidity of viewers and reviewers," and follows this with the quote, "I hate audiences" (263). In an instance of the latter, where the commentary and quote seem out of synch, Carney compares Cassavetes to the character Cosmo from *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, preceding a quote that has no obvious link to Cosmo in which Cassavetes says, "Filmmaking is a craft, that I want to keep learning" (384). Whether this quote was said in the context of the film or not is up for grabs, and why it is used to show Cassavetes' difference from Cosmo, or why that needs to be asserted, is opaque. It seems to reflect Carney's vision of Cassavetes—expressed here and in his other books—as not so much an artist who constructs representations as one who expresses the real in a seemingly unmediated way.

Still, much of the most interesting material in the book exists in Carney's commentary, not Cassavetes' words. In speech, as in his films, Cassavetes is often loose, rambling, passionate, and oddly inarticulate. At least in the quotes gathered here, he does not tend to tell elaborate stories, and he is resolutely unwilling to offer interpretations of his work. So most of the narrative, and most of the detail about Cassavetes, comes from Carney's commentary. Through the commentary, we learn about Cassavetes' penchant for clowning around, his temper, his drinking, his health, his theories of acting, and more. Ultimately, for fans, the portrait of Cassavetes makes reading *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* worthwhile, but fans and novices might have been better served by a conventional biography or a collection of interviews, rather than this complicated hybrid.

Pamela Robertson Wojcik is an associate professor in the Department of Film, TV and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame.

Complicated Women

Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood

By Mick LaSalle. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. $25.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

As lovers of film, we hope that the books we read about our beloved medium will be written by people who are both scholars and film buffs. It is the difficult task of an author to draw the line between the two, and thus add to the growing body of knowledge and remain useful for study. Mick LaSalle, in his book *Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood*, oversteps this boundary, and what insight he has to offer is often lost in the adoration of Norma Shearer and Greta Garbo that becomes the focus of this work.

LaSalle's initial claims are large, promising, and ultimately unsupported. He believes that "the best era for women's pictures was the pre-Code era, the five years between the point that talkies became widely accepted in 1929 through July 1934, when the dread and draconian Production Code became the law of Hollywoodland" (1). According to LaSalle, the Code came in mainly to "prevent women from having fun" (1), since in the pre-Code era women enjoyed a great deal of liberation on film, mainly sexually. This is a large claim, and LaSalle does little to back it up. In fact, though there is a bibliography, there is not a single footnote in the work (and the actual Production Code should have been included as an appendix). When he states that Norma Shearer knew more about public taste in regards to her own career than husband/producer Irving Thalberg, the reader simply has to take it for granted . . . or balk at the idea.

The last lines of the introduction offer a more fitting objective of this book. Referring to the women actors in pre-Code times, LaSalle writes, "it's time we reclaim them and the pictures they left us. This book is written to help us do that" (9). He does proceed to do that, spending the first half of the work on the careers of Shearer and Garbo, who broke the stereotypes of women onscreen. Shearer was able to take the ingenue role into the bedroom, making it a place where good women could also go, not only the bad ones. For Garbo, "love is religion" (34), thus her vamp was virtuous, and often even became a martyr.

LaSalle is at his best when he is not trying to reach too far. He is very good at pinning down the relationship between the stars and the characters they play. When he compares the onscreen personas of each of these women, he offers succinct, intelligent ways of looking at them: "In Garbo's movies, lovers are linked by destiny and by God. In Shearer's films, marriage is a secular arrangement, a formalized agreement between pals" (70). Another nice touch is a brief history of the vamp that places Garbo's characters in perspective historically. When the writing is concentrated, it is of substance. But too much time is spent adoring these women rather than exploring them. One of his frequent refrains is: "It's hard to imagine any other actress of the period playing the moment so well" (181). Clearly his vision has been clouded by the luminescence of the stars.

He does a moderate job of examining the pre-Code careers of such players as Harlow, Crawford, Dvorak, Blondell, West, Dietrich, and others without lapsing into stargazing. After this discussion, LaSalle alleges that "in the early thirties, and especially as the pre-Code era wore on, Hollywood addressed women's issues and problems with artistry and seriousness. Women's stories were being told" (165). However, he has just been discussing how often these actors played prostitutes, murderers, and "loose" women. So, contrary to his conclusion, "real" women's stories were not being ousted by the Code, unless he is also claiming that the average woman at that time could be defined by one of those three terms, which is left unsubstantiated.

In discussing how the Code changed films, LaSalle rightfully points out that one of the most deplorable traits was that philandering husbands were always forgiven by their wives, due to the Code's insistence on the sanctity of the family. But in doing so, and in being so enamored of the leading ladies of the time, he seems to place the strength of the women's pre-Code characters on the shoulders of the actors, and their post-Code weakness on the shoulders of the censors. Somewhere, the contribution of writers (or even of directors and producers and the studio system) becomes irrelevant.

Eventually, the author moves on to discuss the influence of the Code on today's films: "Before the Code, romance and sex were intertwined. It was the Code that wrenched them apart, and the divorce remains in effect today" (136). However, LaSalle's previous discussion about how the pre-Code films were filled with women who were sexually liberated demonstrated that sex and romance were not necessarily connected at all. In essence, he has it backward. The Code instilled romance as a replacement for sex. The sexuality in today's films is due to a number of factors, not the Code's arrival six decades ago.

When trying to make parallels to recent films and actors, LaSalle compares Drew Barrymore to Jean Harlow, as being "baby-faced, blond, and mature beyond her years" (139), forgetting that Harlow made films for adults, while Barrymore's films are aimed at a teen audience; thus their representations of women are quite different. And when discussing Ashley Judd, LaSalle focuses mainly on her few minutes as a crack addict in *Smoke*, rather than her debut in *Ruby in Paradise*, in which she is the epitome of a woman searching for independence. He should clearly stick to the earlier era.

In the end, the book seems as much as anything to be a call for a reevaluation of the career of Norma Shearer, but when LaSalle mentions numerous other contemporary works lauding Shearer, as well as a major retrospective of her works held in 1994, it also seems like this reevaluation has been done. So what do we have left? A strong sense of nostalgia for an era of film most of us have tried to recapture by watching old movies on video and in repertory houses, and a somewhat better understanding of Shearer and Garbo and the screen personalities of the times. But we could also get that from a bowl of popcorn and a copy of *Flesh and the Devil.*

Mark Shaiman is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Countervisions

Asian American Film Criticism

Edited by Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000. $74.50 cloth; $24.95 paper.

Although a handful of publications on the issue of Asian (and Asian-American) representations has appeared over the course of the last two-and-a-half decades, book-length scholarship on Asian-American film criticism remains relatively scarce. Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu's anthology is a valuable and welcome addition to this emergent field. Hamamoto and Liu have gathered together an eclectic cross-section of critical positions—essays that interrogate Asian-American representations and film practices from various perspectives, shuttling between aesthetics, theories of spectatorship, ethnic stardom, identity politics, and industrial conditions. Not only does the book bridge the gap between production and criticism by incorporating interviews with and articles by several Asian-American filmmakers, but it also resists and makes porous the boundaries of national cinemas and institutional demarcations. *Countervisions* thus constitutes a panoply of critical interventions whose targets include independent documentaries, experimental videos, mainstream films, pornography, and Hong Kong cinema.

In his introduction, Hamamoto provides an overview of Asian-American film and criticism since the 1960s. He points out that Asian-American film criticism has sidestepped "the excesses of psychoanalytic abstractions and theoreticism" to stress the impact of history and politics on marginalized communities (3). After surveying a number of Asian-American films exploring politicized themes and subtexts (including gay and lesbian rights, the colonial relation between the U.S. and the Philippines, the victimization of Asian-American adoptees, and human rights violations in China), Hamamoto concludes that over the last 30 years "Asian-American independent filmmaking and criticism have helped forge an oppositional cultural practice that contests a mutually reinforcing system of race, class, and gender oppression" under a U.S.-led global capitalist system (16).

Hamamoto's assertion lays the bedrock for the book's ensuing chapters. The first cluster of essays, "Resignifying Asian American Bodies," comprises revisionist interpretations of two pioneering Orientalized actresses of the classical Hollywood era. Cynthia W. Liu's article, "When Dragon Ladies Die, Do They Come Back as Butterflies? Re-Imagining Anna May Wong," engages a recasting of the extradiegetic, cross-media discourse surrounding the woefully misreckoned Wong. Liu effectively subverts Wong's typecast Dragon Lady persona by reclaiming the actress's outspoken resistance to Hollywood casting politics and stereotyping of Asians as well as her importance to contemporary writers such as David Henry Hwang, Jessica Hagedorn, and John Yau. Likewise, in "Recuperating Suzie Wong: A Fan's Nancy Kwan-dary," Peter W. Feng argues that "Asian American spectatorial pleasure" of a racially retrograde Hollywood feature like *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) depends upon a "strategy of selectively re-narrativizing elements of a star's performance" (47). A resistant spectator, according to Feng, mentally traces over a racist narrative and recasts stereotyped characters "from scavenged bits and pieces of a film" (47) in a way similar to the strategies employed in Helen Lee's film *Sally's Beauty Spot* (1990), which manipulates and reedits Nancy Kwan's images from *Suzie Wong* for the pleasure of the Asian-American spectator. Although a "resistant spectator" is an oft-recycled formation in the discourse of black spectatorship enunciated by Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Manthia Diawara, and others, Feng nevertheless puts a fresh spin on the text/star/spectator triad by foregrounding the ethnic star image as a site of resignification.

In part two, "Negotiating Institutional Boundaries," Hamamoto's provocative article, "The Joy Fuck Club: Prolegomenon to an Asian American Porno Practice," convincingly argues that Asian-American sexuality is dominated by the white racial imagery of Hollywood films. Moreover, Hamamoto criticizes the white-supremacist porno video industry (both straight and gay), which capitalizes on either eroticized yellow female bodies or effeminate "rice queen" imagery primarily catering to white male pleasure. Taking a radical/resistant stance to the mainstream media's distorted representation of Asian-American sexuality, he calls for a "Yellow porno practice" (a.k.a. "Joy Fuck Club") through which Asian Americans self-represent their own "racial *jouissance*" (81-82). Granting Hamamoto's sexual politics are progressive and action-oriented, I feel compelled to ask what the outcome of such a self-pornographic practice might be if the scopophilic drive inscribed therein proves less instrumental in the unleashing of sexual autonomy within Asian-American communities than originally anticipated. While Hamamoto traverses the liminality between the diametrically opposed thresholds of porno and non-porno, Sandra Liu, in her essay "Negotiating the Meaning of Access: Wayne Wang's Contingent Film Practice," deconstructs the prevalent dichotomy between mainstream and independent. She reevaluates Wayne Wang's crossover successes such as *Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Smoke* (1995) by providing a barometer of the film industry's climate throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Liu urges Asian-American film critics to break away from debates about "authentic" or "stereotypical" representations and to take account of the institutional exigencies that force minority filmmakers to compromise in order to survive.

The essays in part three, "Critical Approaches to Representing Japanese-American Internment," investigate independent films and videos about the Japanese-American incarceration during World War II. Kent A. Ono, in "Re/membering Spectators: Meditations on Japanese-American Cinema," asserts that media productions explicitly concerned with the incarceration invite spectators to actively participate in the "history-making process" instead of remaining sutured subjects passively limning the outskirts of the text (129). He also argues that many of these films, often directed by third-generation Japanese Americans uncovering the experiences of their parents, capsize

the "ocularcentric" structure of mainstream cinema and foreground "the oral features of memory," as in Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991) (136-37). One of the merits of Ono's essay is that it attempts to situate Japanese-American history and spectatorship within the larger context of "the reciprocal colonial relationship between Japan and the United States." As Ono states, "Understanding production, consumption, and culture, especially that associated with Japanese-American spectatorship, makes little sense without addressing U.S. imperialism in Asian countries, Japanese colonialism of other Asian peoples, and the specific diasporic conditions" (132). Though Ono admirably stresses the particularity of Japanese-American history and its deviation from that of other Asian Americans—partly because of Japan's imperial status in Asia—he, like other contributors, does not address how the legacy of Japanese colonialism permeates the works of Asian-American filmmakers, for example Dai Sil Kim-Gibson's *A Forgotten People: The Sakhalin Koreans* (1995) and *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (1999), and Christine Choy and Nancy Tong's documentary *In the Name of the Emperor* (1998).

Glen Masato Mimura's "Antidote for Collective Amnesia? Rea Tajiri's Germinal Image" focuses on female-directed internment films and videos: Lise Yasui's *A Family Gathering* (1988), Janice Tanaka's *Memories from the Department of Amnesia* (1991), and Tajiri's *History and Memory*. He identifies "the motif of memory—its absence, inconsistencies, revisions, repressions" as collective characteristics of these works (151). According to Mimura, each film/video-maker creates a "germinal image" (such as the shot of Tajiri's mother filling a canteen in *History and Memory*) that neutralizes the disturbing nature of trauma and fills the gap of absent or inconsistent memory (156). In "The Gendering of Historical Trauma in Internment-Camp Documentary: The Case of Steven Okazaki's *Days of Waiting*," Elena Tajima Creef interrogates Okazaki's Academy Award-winning documentary, which narrates the history of Japanese-American internment through the experiential lens of a Caucasian woman artist, Estelle Peck Ishigo, who was interned with her Japanese husband in Wyoming. Unlike Hollywood's Caucasian-focalized internment films like *Come See the Paradise* (1990), *Days of Waiting* symbolically transforms the white spectator from a passive bystander to an active participant in the history of internment.

Part four, "Exploring Form," constitutes an investigation of Asian-American media aesthetics. Video artist Valerie Soe's essay, "Fighting Fire with Fire: *Détournement*, Activism, and Video Art," unpacks several Asian-American videos, including Spencer Nakasako's *Do It on the Oriental* (1990), Tajiri's *History and Memory*, and Soe's own projects, through the prism of the Situationist International's method of *détournement*. In these works, artists appropriate and recontextualize mainstream media's images, thus hijacking or altering their meanings. Soe elaborates the *détournement* of Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of Asians in her videos *All Orientals Look the Same* (1986) and *Picturing Oriental Girls: A (Re) Educational Videotape* (1992). In "Hybrid Cinema by Asian-American Women," Jun Xing discusses experimental films and videos by Asian-American women; lamentably, the essay recapitulates many of the same titles—from Yasui's *A Family Gathering* and Tanaka's *Memories from the Department of Amnesia* to Soe's *Picturing Oriental Girls* and Tajiri's habitually cited *History and Memory*—examined in the preceding articles. Though the aforementioned essays obviously exude a level of thematic and stylistic significance deserving of meticulous scrutiny, the repeated recycling of these films makes one wish that more space had been allotted to the excavation of less canonized works. Xing theorizes Asian-American women's avant-garde films in both temporal and spatial terms, drawing upon Teshome Gabriel's theory of nomadic Third Cinema aesthetics and Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of "interstitial space." Segueing smoothly from Xing's discussion of Trinh's film and theory, the anthology includes Gwendolyn Foster's interview with Trinh on the making of *A Tale of Love* (1995). Evoking the French feminist theory of *écriture féminine*, Trinh explains how in her film the female protagonist Kieu fluidly glides between two identities emerging out of different times and spaces (the present-day Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S. and the nineteenth-century Vietnamese heroine of the celebrated poem "The Tale of Kieu").

In part five, "Beyond 'Nation': Diaspora and Hybrid Identities," Trinh's theoretical alliance with French post-structuralists is challenged by Renee Tajima-Peña, who rejects Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault in favor of Asian-American political activism. Tajima-Peña's autobiographical essay epitomizes the maxim "The Personal Is Political." Guiding Tajima-Peña's personal journey into pan-Asian-American identity while making *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988) and *My America . . . or Honk if You Love Buddha* (1997) is her passionate advocacy of a politics of engaged cinema over lifeless theory. Theodore S. Gonzalves' conversation with Filipino-American filmmaker Celine Salazar Parreñas, a co-founder of the active media collective SINEGANG, steers the anthology momentarily away from the corpus of Chinese-American and Japanese-American films. Resisting an ethnocentric identity politics which celebrates communal subjectivity, Parreñas emphasizes heterogeneous experiences within the Los Angeles and San Francisco Filipino immigrant communities in her films *Her Uprooting Plants Her* (1995) and *Super Flip* (1997). The last two essays in the volume, Gina Marchetti's "*The Wedding Banquet*: Global Chinese and the Asian-American Experience" and Julian Stringer's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema," destabilize the boundaries of Asian-American cinema in the context of transnationalism. Both authors uproot the spatial and national fixity of Asian-American identities and investigate hybrid, diasporic identities represented in Taiwanese and Hong Kong films in the age of global capitalism.

In her article, Renee Tajima-Peña tellingly compares Asian-American demographics of the 1970s, when "we were predominantly Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and American-born," with those of the present, when "we came to represent more than 50 nationalities," the majority of whom are for-

eign-born (247, 251). *Countervisions* may indeed leave readers with an aftertaste of incompleteness, an impression that its essays tend to concentrate on the aforementioned three major ethnicities, unintentionally marginalizing other groups who lay equal claim to Asian-American filmmaking and criticism. Although the book's subtitle presumes a comprehensive vision of "Asian-American film criticism," the anthology in general focuses less on the pan-ethnic, comparative dimensions of Asian-American film than on the representation of and cultural praxis within individual ethnic groups. And yet, despite these minor quibbles, this collection of vibrant and challenging essays not only deserves a permanent place on the bookshelves of readers with a budding interest in Asian-American media studies, but also raises the bar for scholars who pursue further research in this exciting field.

Hye Seung Chung is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Race in Cyberspace

Edited by Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman. New York: Routledge, 2000. $19.99.

In a critical response to egalitarian, democratic, and utopian notions of cyberspace, Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman bring racial politics to the forefront with *Race in Cyberspace*—a diverse anthology that highlights thoughtful considerations regarding the interrelationship between race and cyberspace relative to identity, representation, language, and technology. As stated in the introductory chapter, "the bulk of the growing body of literature in cyberspace studies has focused on only a handful of issues and arguments, in ways that have effectively directed the conversation on cyber culture away from questions of race" (5). The editors challenge academia's neglect and silence by collecting a variety of viewpoints that stress the importance of race within computer-based dimensions, arguing that online and offline culture cannot be treated as separate. Indeed, culturally constructed phenomena, cyberspace, and race intersect, interact, and reciprocally define each other, engendering wholly new combinations of ethnicity and raciality (10).

Lisa Nakamura sets the tone for the anthology with her piece, "'Where do you want to go today?': Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet, and Transnationality," an intriguing analysis of advertising strategies employed by high-tech corporations, who exploit notions of "otherness" and the "global village" in order to promote the Internet as a mythic universal world. Nakamura states that these marketing approaches create "concepts" of cyberspace that replicate, restructure, and reinforce Anglocentric narratives of colonialism, consumerism, and tourism deeply embedded within American dominant ideology. Jennifer Gonzalez's "The Appended Subject: Race and Identity as Digital Assemblage" examines the formulation of virtual subjects—a new citizenry of cyberbodies that are racially marked and determined by the hand of their creators. Gonzalez explores Russian artist Kostya Mitenev's UNIDA and U.S.-based artist Victoria Vesna's Bodies© INCorporated, two interactive websites that "serve as a reminder that human bodies continue to be the material and visible form through which human subjectivities are defined and contested today, despite the now popular belief in cyberspace as the ultimate realm of disembodiment" (48).

The next three essays deal with racial representation within the world of motion pictures and computer gaming. Jeffery A. Ow's "The Revenge of the Yellowfaced Cyborg Terminator: The Rape of Digital Geishas and the Colonization of Cyber Coolies in 3D Realms' *Shadow Warrior*" draws upon Donna Haraway's notion of "the male cyborg warrior," a techno-human hybrid who "continues to march on preestablished pathways of colonization, domination, and destruction through his militarized versions of video games and Nintendo war" (53). Ow creatively argues that 3D Realms' interactive game positions the user as "a racist and misogynist Yellowfaced Cyborg Terminator, on his solitary quest to rape, pillage, and claim the Asian continent, leaving nothing but carnage" (55). Structuring his argument as a computer game itself (advancing from level one, level two, and concluding at end game), Ow weaves together *Shadow Warrior*'s controversial reception with theories of white male fantasy, Orientalism, and cyborgian philosophy, exposing the terror at the base of mis-racialized computer gaming construction.

David Crane and Rajani Sudan effectively confront filmic representations of cyberspace and the presence of racial politics within particular mainstream Hollywood narratives. Crane's piece, "In Medias Face: Filmic Representation, Networked Communication, and Racial Intermediation," investigates the narrative function of black characters in the films *Strange Days*, *Hackers*, *Virtuosity*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, and *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, ultimately arguing their marginalized position as intermediaries between real and virtual worlds (10). Sudan's "Sexy SIMS, Racy SIMMS" investigates the complicated blurring of real and virtual boundaries via cybertechnology and cinema. In particular, Sudan inspects the exploitation of visual simulation technology in Phillip Kaufman's 1993 "whodunit" thriller *Rising Sun*, illustrating the film's ideological underpinnings that expose postindustrial American anxieties regarding Japanese culture and globalization (73).

Where Crane, Sudan, and Ow explore overt racial representations in relation to cyberspace, computer technology, and cinema, Tara McPherson and David Silver probe the amorphous world of computer-generated spaces, exposing the covert strategies that render race invisible. The genesis of McPherson's study, "I'll Take My Stand in Dixie-Net: White Guys, the South, and Cyberspace," lies in her accidental discovery of Neo-Confederate websites. Instead of shrugging off these virtual spaces as simply racist, McPherson critically interrogates these environments in an attempt to understand the clandestine function that white Southern masculinity enacts. By literally erasing blacks from Confederate history and reconstructing the South via virtual maps, songs, and images, these sites publicize and propagate

the preservation of a highly constructed Southern Heritage. McPherson argues that the erasure of race, the denouncement of white supremacy groups, and the selective appropriation of discursive practices (borrowed from civil rights groups and a wide range of nationalist struggles) within these spaces illustrate a covert strategy to "stage a new visibility for whiteness as an injured, wronged, violated whiteness . . . marginalized because of their Southerness" (126-27). Not only does McPherson assert that the separatist logic of these sites and their anti-anything-but-white characteristics are clearly racist, she also contends that virtual cyber-Dixie forces us to reconsider cyber-tropes of play, multiplicity, and theater toward explorations of citizens, politics, and publics (129).

David Silver's "Margins in the Wires: Looking for Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Blacksburg Electronic Village" also exposes cyber-racial inequality through an investigation of community-sponsored networks (listservs, chat rooms, online shopping malls, etc.). Using Blacksburg, Virginia's Electronic Village, as his case study, Silver illustrates how interface design and the omission of minority group representation "routes around race" (138). In an effort to prevent further racial exclusion and foster diverse community networks, Silver asserts that Web designers "must not only acknowledge the presence of users' races, genders, and sexualities, but also build that presence directly into the network" (148).

The two following essays focus less on visual images of race, progressing toward the consideration of the significatory and expressive role language plays in cyberspace. Joe Lockard, in "Babel Machines and Electronic Universalism," questions utopian notions of a global "electronic nation" by exposing the foundational standard of cyber-English throughout the World Wide Web. Lockard argues that this elitist linguistic standard omits racialized and ethnic communities by promoting "a monotonal and monolithic self-conception embedded in virtual whiteness" (172). Mark Warschauer's "Race, Identity, and the Internet" examines the constructive use of cyberspace by introducing language revitalization efforts on the Internet. In a unique study of Hawaiian-language students at the University of Hawaii, Warschauer discusses the ways Hawaiian identity and language are revived through the creation of ethnic-specific, multi-mediated websites authored by individual students.

Jonathan Sterne logically extends this focus on the relationship between cyberspace and educational environments with his historical investigation, "The Computer Race Goes to Class: How Computers in Schools Helped Shape the Racial Topography of the Internet." Sterne's cogent analysis illustrates the effects of technological public policy and the devastating restrictions governmental and corporate entities impose in regards to computer access within the classroom. Sterne argues that maldistribution of computers in educational environments during the early 1980s has significantly shaped the Anglocentric, white-faced ideology that saturates cyberspace and network creation today.

Beth E. Kolko concludes the anthology with a grain of optimism and hope by examining the historical factors that have successfully written race away from virtual computer-mediated environments, specifically MUD's and MOO's. Focusing on the ways interface design determines the production of avatars—virtual subjects created by a user to interact with other online individuals participating in a particular virtual world—Kolko offers possible solutions to the problem of racial erasure on the Internet. Kolko introduces her own self-created virtual world, MOOscape, a computer-mediated environment that allows users the option to racially identify themselves. Only time will tell what form Kolko's racialized world will take, but her efforts and analysis clearly demonstrate the political power of Web design and the possibilities available to proactive Internet users and engineers.

Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman have composed a diverse and eclectic mix of writings that uniquely integrate race into cyberspace discourse. Though this is not explicitly stated, the sequential ordering of the collection from image-based analysis to more abstract and theoretical concerns to public policy and interface construction allows a meta-argument to develop. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, race and cyberspace are not biological creations but socially constructed phenomena, determined and defined by a multiplicity of social, political, and cultural interventions. Particular notions of race and cyberspace are embedded within the institutional structures of American society, and examination of each realm is essential in order to rethink, unthink, and reform the powerful ways mass communication technology informs the twentyfirst-century subject. The choices the editors make in regards to the selection and presentation of the essays mentioned clearly support a social constructivist notion that cyberspace and race are "phantasmatic effects of culture, rather than simple and stable facts of biology (in the case of race) or technology (in the case of cyberspace)" (11).

The collection covers a wide array of viewpoints; however, the omission of an essay that focuses primarily on the relationship between Latinos and cyberspace is a major oversight. Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman clearly state in their introduction that they "have no illusion that this collection addresses all" of the important questions pertaining to race and cyberspace, yet the significant omission and lack of substantial consideration of the second largest minority group in America is quite telling of the representational problems present even within a text that tries to rectify racial subjugation (11). Furthermore, the collection would have benefited from the inclusion of more than one essay (Warschauer) that focused on racially and ethically orientated websites or newsgroups that foster community building and diasporic formations. Although, these sites are less common, a discussion of race and cyberspace would profit from the examination of cybertexts produced by and for the minority voices that are silenced.

Even so, *Race in Cyberspace* succeeds at putting "questions of race more squarely on the table" by exposing new ways of situating race within the vast expanse of cyberspace

(11). This collection of well-written and provocative essays proves invaluable to anyone interested in exploring race in computer-mediated environments or media in general. As cyberspace becomes increasingly intertextual and multimediated (combining commerce, visual imagery, and text with movement, sound, and narrative), the inspection of the virtual realm becomes ever more important within a variety of disciplines. Whether they come from the field of film and television, art history, technology, communications, English, education, or ethnic or cultural studies, the contributors of *Race in Cyberspace* illustrate the striking interdisciplinary participation already in progress within cyberspace discourse. Furthermore, as digital media, television, and film progressively converge, the impact of computer-mediated technology upon notions of spectatorship, performance, representation, narrative, modes of production, and text becomes ever more complicated and ambiguous. All in all, *Race in Cyberspace* acts as a valuable springboard for the necessary interrogation and reevaluation of digital technology in order to better understand the complex intersections of race, mass media, and entertainment in contemporary American culture.

Erica Bochanty is a graduate student in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Tinker Belles and Evil Queens

The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out

Sean Griffin. New York: New York University Press, 2000. $55.00 cloth; $19.00 paper.

Sean Griffin sets out to examine the influence of gay and lesbian employees in the Walt Disney Company since its very beginnings. Most of the book focuses on presenting a fairly detailed "alternate history," including the results of extensive research on the company's corporate history together with textual analyses of well-known animated films and television shows and taking into consideration other forms of Disney paraphernalia. The author utilizes a variety of theoretical approaches in order to articulate the ways in which the study of gender and sexuality might influence audience reception of Disney works through different eras. Griffin not only presents a theoretical discussion of Disney texts and their possible readings, but also grounds a significant part of his study in historical research and analysis. He also specifically considers the active role of different marketing strategies and the use of technological developments in animation in the construction and promotion of heterosexual paradigms in Disney texts.

The book is divided into two sections, each of which attempts to examine the history of the Walt Disney Company through a queer perspective. The first section is devoted entirely to the Walt Disney Company during the life of the paterfamilias himself. The second part analyzes in detail the evolution of the company since Walt Disney's death, concentrating on the Michael Eisner era. In the first section, Griffin deals with what he calls Disney's "heterosexual" and "capitalist" agendas, arguing that in the 1920s the company's animated features could be thought of as "carnivalesque," with androgynous characters and violent content. However, in the 30s the company wanted to promote a new kind of "mystique" that would portray the Walt Disney Company as a "family company"—a key marketing strategy designed to attract middle-class family audiences during the Great Depression, a time when many people believed that the lack of morality of the Roaring 20s was to blame for the country's problems. Griffin also focuses on Disney's technological developments and how these were used to promote a sort of "heterosexual realism." A look at the way Griffin maps Mickey Mouse's history during this period sums up his unique blend of theory and historical research. By the 1930s the character itself, he argues, had been transformed from the androgynous, elastic, and violent rural figure of the 20s into a nonviolent, more humanlike middle-class heterosexual male in suburban settings. This in turn, with the introduction of Technicolor and multi-plane animation, promoted an "illusion of life" that would seem to abide by natural laws.

Griffin also discusses the ways in which his research and textual analyses could be mapped onto more abstract theoretical discourses on gender and sexuality. For example, he stresses the performative nature of gender roles by using the characters of Mickey and Minnie as examples of Judith Butler's theory: they are both the same humanlike mouse; the only significant element that emphasizes gender difference is their clothing.

The core of the first section presents the difficult task of reading a text against what it explicitly—and convincingly—sets out to convey: in this case, heterosexuality as the norm. Griffin's analysis, which specifically tries to reflect how gay and lesbians might enjoy Disneyana (before and after Disney's death), moves from "an amorphous queer viewpoint to a more definite lesbian or gay reading strategy." References to E.M. Forster and Sergei Eisenstein open up the analysis; Griffith claims they were fascinated with the scandalous aspect and "oddness" of Mickey (Forster) and the transmogrifying element in early Disney animation (Eisenstein). Both men, according to Griffin, were attracted to the "queerness" in the features that homosexuals often found akin to their lives. The "metamorphosis" of elements was significantly reduced during Disney's commitment to the "illusion of life"; however, Griffin adds that Disney's animations also contained anal humor that appealed to gay men and that transcended the limitations of this stage. Perhaps the most interesting part of Griffin's analysis is the way in which he discusses "definite gay and lesbian reading strategies," specifically those dealing with Disney's villains. These characters—he cites examples such as Captain Hook and Snow White's Evil Queen—are presented as potentially queer, that is, as asexual but with a common objective of disrupting the heterosexual romance between the main characters.

The second part of the book deals with the history of the company since the death of Walt Disney, concentrating primarily on the period in which Michael Eisner served as CEO. In this section, Griffin deals with the sexual revolution—the Stonewall riot and the gay liberation movement, which called for an acceptance of other forms of sexual expression. The company's attitudes toward homosexual employees are also examined. For instance, Griffith looks at earlier examples (such as late 50s teenage actor Tommy Kirk, whose contract was terminated because he had sexual relations with another male teen) which illustrate the company's continuing hostility toward homosexuals until the creation of LEAGUE (Lesbian and Gay United Employees) in the early 90s. LEAGUE served to exemplify the "assimilationist" attitudes of the current gay and lesbian movement when it was granted existence with the condition that it would not only serve as a social club (forbidden any overt political activism) but, most importantly, would also reinforce the "sanctity and desirability of marriage" by stating that domestic partner benefits for gay and lesbian employees were given to couples that *would marry* but were unable to do so by law. Griffin draws the conclusion that the homosexual labor movement was of significant importance within the history of Disney—not only did it emphasize and strengthen the presence of gay and lesbian employees, but it also introduced such influence into mainstream consciousness, allowing for all audiences to engage in queer interpretations of the texts.

Griffin also attempts to discuss issues that are immediately relevant to film studies, such as the contested issue of authorship and the theoretical problems that arise as it encounters reception theory. He argues "authorship as a performance of identity" (refering to the way in which audiences can ascribe meaning or intentionality to works by a particular author), arriving at this conclusion after evaluating and discussing basic notions regarding auteur theory (he cites Andrew Sarris and James Naremore) and how these notions may be complemented by reception studies. He specifically uses the example of *Beauty and the Beast,* implying that since the film was dedicated to Howard Ashman, a lyricist and producer who died of AIDS, it could be interpreted as an AIDS allegory, with the public ascribing meaning to the film based on its perception of Ashman's identity.

Sean Griffin is successful in engaging and blending theoretical frameworks that attempt to deal with sexuality and audience reception. The fact that most of his research and conclusions are grounded in historical research and textual analyses of popular Disney texts allows for his book to be accessed not only by film and television scholars but also by students or a general reader interested in the Walt Disney Company's history and/or issues regarding sexuality and media. This book would also serve as an attractive way to introduce students to some of the major issues regarding gender, sexuality, and the ways in which these discourses interact with media theory, specifically audience reception and issues regarding authorship.

Jaime Nasser is in the doctoral program in the School of Cinema/Television at the University of Southern California.

Book Notes

Contributor to Book Notes: **Thomas Ebong** holds a Ph.D. in Communications (television and film) from Wayne State University.

Barlet, Olivier. *African Cinemas: Decolonizing the Gaze.* New York: Zed Books, 1996, trans. Chris Turner, 2000; $69.00 cloth; $29.00 paper. Olivier Barlet has adroitly painted a picture of the cinema cultures of Africa, tracing in a simple yet erudite fashion the film histories of the continent from the Maghreb to the Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone, and South African regions. His extensive interviews with African filmmakers contribute immensely to his clear vision of the dynamics at work in the production of the cinemas of Africa (although unfortunately there are so many films mentioned that there is not room for more than scanty information about each).

The book is divided into three well-crafted parts that reflect thematic, narrative, and economic approaches. The thematic approach engages the Western gaze and African responses in a decolonizing style. The narrative section focuses on the unique elements that give identity to the cinemas of Africa: black humor, the role of silence, the significance of language, orality, symbols, the talking drums, sound, myth, pace, space, and time. The economic section deals with the hardcore realities that are at play in the production of African films: the financial ordeals of the directors, foreign aid, freedom of expression, difficulties of production and distribution (including the problem of language, which greatly hampers distribution of African films).

Barlet is the first writer to focus extensively on feminist themes and on women film directors' contribution to the African film industry; he also discusses television production and the important role of the audience. In a style that reads like a text for the student of African cinema, a reference book for the teacher, and a compendium of knowledge of African film history, culture, and politics for the general public, the book describes how African cinema has progressed from the simple presentation of reality in the 1980s to a highly paradoxical form of enunciation in the 90s. Nobody can feel at home in black cinema studies without reading this book.

—Thomas Ebong